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DON JOHN.

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DON JOHN

A Story

BY JEAN INGELOW

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. II.

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DON JOHN.

CHAPTER I

DONALD JOHNSTONE walked on to his house and said not another word.

Maria Jane Collingwood in his field—*the lodger* whom he had heard his children talk of. He had recognized her instantly; to what end could she possibly have come there that did not bode disquiet, if not disaster to him and his.

He walked straight to his wife's room, and there remembered that he was to entertain a party at dinner that night.

Mrs. Johnstone was just dressed, her

maid had stepped back to survey her. The two elder girls, who loved to assist at their mother's toilet, were tying up some flowers.

Tall, upright as a wand, slender, and placid she stood. He looked fixedly at her, and sighed.

"Father," said Naomi, "mother has got our favourite gown on. Doesn't she look sweet?"

He continued to look at her, but said nothing.

"It's so thick and soft," said Marjorie, feeling the folds of the satin; "and just the colour of cream—and, mother, these roses are exactly the same colour—and look at their little soft brown leaves."

The mother took her bouquet and smiled at their enthusiasm.

"You look well, my star," said her husband. He felt that there was no time now to say anything to her, and he hastened off to his dressing-room.

There, while he dressed, he saw the fat little woman, who had been the plague of his life, waddling along the path through his field, and he hated the sight of her.

He trembled with irritation and impatience, for nothing could be done. He must entertain his guests, and he absolutely must leave his boys and girls to wander all about the fields that evening, though she might have come there on purpose to say to them what he most wished them not to hear.

His wife's unconsciousness calmed him a little, however. They were alone together for half a minute in the drawing-room before the first guests entered.

“Estelle,” he began, “I met that woman this evening whom the children call *the lodger*. I wish they had not seen anything of her.”

A tentative remark. She answered with perfect serenity.

"Oh, yes, my dear—I wish it too—but there is no harm done; and I have told them not to go into the field at all, but to keep in our woods and garden this evening."

"No harm done?" he repeated in a tone of inquiry.

"I meant that there is no reason they should not associate a little with the honest poor; but this person, a vulgar, second-rate woman, as I gather, is just the sort of creature we should like to guard them from."

"Ah! exactly so," he answered; and added mentally, while the first guests were announced, "if we can."

"Well, I hope there is no harm done," he reflected; "and yet if that woman had wished to say anything to either of the boys, surely she might have found opportunity to say it by this time. It must be a month, or nearly so, since I first heard them mention her."

He made rather an inattentive host that evening ; he was nervous, and sometimes absent, but not half as much so as he would have been if he could have known what was coming to pass.

Lancey's punishment had begun.

The young people, while their elders dined, were having their supper in the play-rooom. It suited Lancey to appear to be in excellent spirits. All the girls began to talk of the supposed robbery, and then, frightened as he was, he had to feign interest and curiosity.

" Does the lodger mean to have a policeman come ? " asked Don John.

Lancey turned cold and sick.

" I don't know," answered Charlotte, who had been sent to Mrs. Clarboy's house with a message about some needlework ; " Mrs. Clarboy and Jenny were both crying when I got there. They said they were wretched for fear they should be

suspected—and so were the Salisburys; and yet—”

“ Well ? ” said Lancey.

“ They said they wished they had never seen her, and yet, when Salisbury came in the morning to break it to her, that the door had been open all night, and her keys were dangling in her desk, where, of course, she never could have been so careless as to leave them, she said, ‘ I know I have been robbed ; I know all about it.’ ”

“ Extraordinary ! ” exclaimed Don John.

“ She too had been crying bitterly they say.”

Lancey was so giddy with fright that if the least suspicion concerning him had crossed Don John’s mind, and he had looked at him, he must have discovered all. As it was, dismissing the contemned lodger from his mind, he said,—

“ Well now, Charlotte—*the minutes*—call in Fetch and let’s have some fun.”

How Lancey got through the next hour or two he never could remember afterwards. He knew he was frightened, miserable, guilty, he knew that in order to satisfy his tyrant he had risked and lost the happiness of all his future life.

He gave Button-nose a kiss when she was going to bed. It seemed to him almost for the first time in his life that he loved these so-called brothers and sisters very much—that no fun would be so well worth having if Don John was not there to share it with him; that if father and mother found out what he had done, he never would be so happy any more.

Why had he done it? At least he need not have taken so much. If he had contented himself with the sum that he so sorely needed, the lodger might have thought herself mistaken, when counting over her money she found less than she expected. And, oh, why had he taken the

bag. And now one and another went off to bed. Lancey was left to the last; he wrote a letter and cried over it, and at length he too stole into his little room, and, holding the letter in his hand, sat down at the foot of his bed. The letter was full of lies—lying came just as naturally to poor Lancey as thieving, and he could already do both with a practised hand.

Sometimes when people think intensely of us it makes us think of them. Was that the reason why, in the middle of the night, Mrs. Johnstone had a singular dream?

She dreamed that she saw Lancey sitting on the foot of her bed in his long white night-gown, the moonlight was streaming in, so that every lock of his brown hair, every line of his features was distinctly visible as he sat with his side-face towards her, and he had some coins in his hand which he was counting and laying out upon the quilt.

She thought she spoke gently to him, thinking that he had been walking in his sleep. "Lancey, Lancey," she said, and then he turned, and looked earnestly at her and at his adopted father. She thought he whispered in a mournful tone, "Oh, mother and father, oh, mother and father!" still sitting on the bed; and then she thought he went into the moonbeam and that he walked in it through the open window, and so on and on in the air till he was lost in a cloud.

With a start she awoke, the moon had gone down, all was perfectly dark and perfectly still. Whenever anything aroused in her a solicitude about one of the children, the feeling soon spread till it had embraced them all. She prayed for Lancey as she laid awake thinking of this dream, and then she prayed for all the others. At last sleep came to her again, and she did not awake till it was nigh day. Lancey was gone.

He sat on his little bed a long time, reflecting, and fearing, and repenting, but he saw no opening for confession.

To confess such a deed as he had done, even to Don John, was past his courage, because, to have any effect, it must bring other confessions in its train.

Could he possibly put back the eight sovereigns which remained, and having done so could he stay in his happy home, and brave all the talk he should hear on this subject without betraying himself.

He hoped, he thought he could. A flattering fancy showed him a picture of himself stealing up between the hollyhocks, softly undoing the casement-hasp, and slipping in the money. They would not hear.

Something like genuine repentance made him sigh and sob as he stole down stairs, got away into the garden, and crept round the bushes into the wood. The stars, which moonlight left visible, looked so bright

and so near, that they seemed to be prying at him.

Lancey walked down the wood-path till he came opposite to Salisbury's cottage. He was full of tremour and fear—night-beetles bumped against his face; a great white woolly moth sailed up smelling of musk, little mice ran across the path, and all of these startled him. He passed between the bushes. There was no light burning within; the moonlight struck the little casement-panes without, and made them glitter. He pushed his finger into his waistcoat pocket, and felt the eight sovereigns in the bag. The great experiment was soon to be made. He stole nearer, constantly thinking of how Don John had done that very thing before; surely as he wished to do well—good would come of it; surely he should be helped to do what was right.

The lodger did not really know “all

about it," as she had said. She could only have meant that she strongly suspected some person, the wrong person; and if he could only put so much of the money back nobody would believe her story. He must, he would risk every thing, for he was lost and ruined, if once investigations were made.

His heart beat high, his breath came in little pants, he was quivering with agitation, in which was far more hope than fear. He crept on behind the bushes at the further side of the brook. It was nearly midnight when he stole across the narrow field and risked several times being seen, so sore was his longing to get close to the casement window.

He reached it at last, and his hope was quenched. He laid his cheek against the glass, and put his fingers on the fastening. The curtains hung a few inches apart, and to his alarm he heard soft

whispering voices within. Salisbury and his wife—perhaps a policeman, who could tell—were sitting up; evidently on the watch.

He edged himself back among the holly-hocks, and quite calmly went away by the back of the house. His last chance had failed, his home was forfeit; go he must.

He hardened his heart—had he not tried his very best to repair his fault!—he must now keep the eight sovereigns that was manifest. He supposed all that money would last a long time, and then when he had nothing left, why, he could go to sea.

In the meantime he had always heard that the best place to hide oneself in was London.

Lancey was young for his years, he was strangely undecided, he had often longed to see the world, and wished he could go to sea. But he loved comfort more than

adventure, and to a certain extent he loved the parents who had adopted him, and the brothers and sisters with whom he had been brought up.

He thought he would wait another hour before he started; he went and took leave of his rabbits, and of old Die, it was a sore wrench to leave them behind. He would stay for this one hour in the church porch, surely something would turn up—surely he was not going away for ever?

The shadows were long now the moon was southing. He could steal along by the hedge and not be seen, and he came and leaned against the old wall of the church tower and shed some miserable, contrite tears. But there were strange creakings and groanings up aloft. He could hardly believe that the old clock in the tower was responsible for them all, and then there seemed to be running up and down and jumping in the body of the

church. He turned very cold, something appeared to fall ; a squeak almost human followed ; in the daytime he might have thought of rats, but now his mind was on more awful things. The clock “gave warning,” it was an awful sound—a new sound—and when midnight began to strike, his guilty conscience drove him forth as if the brazen echoes were proclaiming his guilt to all. He ran away in good earnest, glad and almost thankful to go.

About seven o’clock on a sultry evening a decent-looking woman was laying the cloth on a small round table in a moderately clean and very scantily-furnished parlour in London.

Now and then she glanced curiously at a fine boy, who looked very tired, and was sleepily watching her operations.

“He can hardly keep his eyes open,” was her thought ; “what ever shall I do ?”

Lancey—for Lancey it was—had walked during the previous night to within four miles of London; and then a fit of indecision had come upon him, and he had lingered about, losing his way, and lamenting his fate till it was high noon, then finding himself close to the railway by which Mr. Johnstone came up to London every day, he walked across the country from it till an omnibus overtook him, and getting in he coiled himself up in a corner. It did not matter in the least where it was going, for he himself was not bound to any place in particular. He dozed, and ate gingerbread, and in course of time the omnibus stopped at the King's Cross Station, the terminus by which he was accustomed to enter London.

“Father” never came up at that time of day; but yet Lancey did not much relish finding himself at the foot of Pentonville Hill, a locality so familiar to him.

He dived into a side street, and observed almost at once that nearly every house had a card in some window, or over the door setting forth that lodgings were to let in it.

He remembered that he must sleep somewhere, and if he went to an hotel he should be far more liable to discovery than in a quiet street such as this.

So Lancey took some cheap lodgings for a week, a tiny room called a drawing-room, with a tiny bedroom behind it. He was tired and hungry, but he was not equal to the task of ordering dinner, because his landlady seemed to be examining him and cogitating over him.

He went out and subsisted on reflections of buns, tarts, and fruit. At last he came back to his rooms, and his landlady helped him by asking when he would have his supper, and what he would like. He did not know what to have. She told

him, and requested money to pay for the various items, looking curiously at him while he took out his well-filled purse and gave her what she wanted.

He had felt very forlorn during the afternoon. There was a little bird shop not a hundred yards from the station, to which he and Don John always paid a visit when they came to London. The station was not visible from it, and Lancey had felt irresistibly drawn to it. There were squirrels as well as birds, dormice, young tortoises, and goldfish. There you might buy a cock redbreast for sixpence; a chaffinch for twopence, and various other English birds at moderate prices.

Lancey had laid out a small sum in the purchase of two green linnets in cruelly small cages, a bag of seed, and a little tortoise, in a lidless wooden box, lined with a damp sod.

His landlady, having laid the cloth,

brought him up some mutton chops, potatoes, tea, and bread and butter, and left him. Lancey had never in his life been so glad of a comfortable meal. She told him to ring when he wanted her to clear away.

She was a little bustling, clean woman, motherly and observant. Her eyebrows had a peculiar faculty for raising themselves. Lancey knew as well as possible that she was making observations on him, and that frequent sensations of surprise made these eyebrows go up into her forehead as two black arches, which left her large eyelids full of little veins, to droop over her inquisitive brown eyes, which for all their penetration made him feel a certain confidence in her. He thought she was a kind, good woman.

When she came in to clear away, he had set the two cages on the table, and was shaping two small wooden perches for his

miserable little thralls. He evidently did not wish to look at her, and having nothing else to do was whiling away his time by feeding and attending to these new pets.

As he did not speak to her, she made an opening for herself by saying, "You'll have to pay for the use of the castors, sir."

Lancey looked up.

"For the mustard, and pepper, and vinegar inside 'em, I mean," she explained.

"How much?" asked Lancey a little uneasily.

"Ninepence a week."

On hearing of such a small sum, the interest and uneasiness of her young lodger immediately subsided; he pushed the perch into one of the cages, and when the linnet had ended its distressful fluttering she said in a clear, decided tone,—

"Not much used to taking lodgings, I reckon?"

Lancey said nothing.

"And your luggage, sir, when might that be coming?"

"I have no luggage," answered Lancey, blushing.

"Left it at home, I reckon?" and before Lancey had time to reflect his answer had slipped out, "Yes."

She folded up her cloth. "They're in a fine taking about you *there* by this time, I'll go bail," she observed.

"I don't know what you mean," said Lancey, flushing up.

"Just as if I didn't know as well as if you'd told me that you'd run away from home; but now here you are as safe as can be, and you've got at least a whole week to think it over."

"I don't know what you mean," repeated Lancey.

"Why, I mean that you've paid for these lodgings for a week—and you can turn things over in your mind. They're fond of you, I'll be bound—you can turn *that* over."

She lifted up her tray. "I have a son that ran away to sea three years ago come Michaelmas ; I'll assure you he has bitterly enough repented it ever since, poor fellow."

If Lancey had not supposed himself to be utterly beyond fear of detection he would not have answered at all ; as it was, wishing to shirk further discussion, and so confirming her in her thoughts, he said he was sleepy and should now go to bed, which he did, and in spite of uncertainty as to his future, sorrow for his fault, and for the parting from all he held dear, he slept as soundly and as sweetly as the most innocent boy in London.

It was ten o'clock before he had finished his breakfast the next morning, and he

ordered his dinner, which was to be at five o'clock, with the air of one who so fully intended to eat it, that his landlady was sure she should see him again, and hoped he might be in a better humour for answering questions than he was at present.

And yet, as he was about to go out, she did hazard a question.

"And where might you be going now, sir?"

"To the Polytechnic," he answered carelessly, and off he set.

"To the Polytechnic, why, you poor innocent, misguided child—for child you are, and loves childish pleasure still—what ever am I to do for you! Who would think it?" While the landlady said this she looked after Lancey as he walked down the street, and her eyebrows went up almost to the roots of her hair.

Yes, Lancey was actually going to the Polytechnic; he had nothing on earth to

do. "Pepper's ghosts" just then were all in their glory; he had money enough, as he supposed, to last nearly three weeks. Of course, he should not go to sea till the last minute. He and Don John had been trying to produce Pepper's ghosts by means of a magic lantern and two looking-glasses. He should stop there the whole day, and to-morrow (unless he altered his mind and went to see the beasts feed at the Zoological Gardens) to-morrow he would go to the docks.

To say that Lancey was happy at the Polytechnic would be to make a mistake; but he certainly had intervals of enjoyment, when he forgot the past and the future, and puzzled himself over "Pepper's ghosts," and afterwards listened to a lecture, which was enlivened by various chemical experiments, that made noise enough to delight (and deafen) any boy of average tastes.

He came home, ate his dinner, and played with his bird and tortoise. He was more cunning than he had been the previous night. His landlady got nothing at all out of him. He went to bed, but did not sleep so well. He must not spend all his money, he now thought, before he had even decided whether he would go to sea or not. There might be an outfit to buy, and if it cost anything like as much as his clothes did at school, he had not half enough money for it even now, unless he sold his watch.

Yes, he must go to the docks. He ordered his dinner as before and set out. Where should he get a cheap map of London, for he had not a notion how to get to the docks? He sauntered on till he reached the Gower Street Station of the Metropolitan Railway ; for a few pence, as he knew he could go a long way to the eastward, he took a ticket and descended. Then, since

a merciful Providence had ordained that, in spite of his crime, he should yet have a chance of well-doing, he found that he had ten minutes to wait, and that on a dark, dingy book-stall there were maps and the daily papers; he asked for a map of London, and while the selling-boy dived under the back of the stall he glanced at the rows of *Times* newspapers, *Standards*, *Telegraphs*, &c., &c., and his eye carelessly ran over the first advertisement on the top of the second column of the *Times*.

“ To L. A.—L., it is all discovered ; but yet there is time. L., only one person in this world knows. Will you trust that one, and all shall be forgiven and made right again ? Do not throw away your home and your prospects. Trust me, and come to the Euston Hotel. Write your own name on a card, and send it up to No. 16.”

Lancey read the whole of this before it occurred to him that the initials were his own. With a start his eye then passed on to the *Standard*, and there was the same advertisement to L. A. He was instantly sure that the message was to him. How could he doubt that, any more than Don John had put it in.

But where had the money come from? A trembling seized Lancey. He began to be sure that this going to sea was a horrid and unbearable thing; that to give up his home and his family would bring misery and ruin. He had more than five pounds in his pocket: if Don John had contrived to borrow the money here was something towards it, and he would sell his watch besides. Oh, to be at home again; oh, how sweet the promise that all should be set right. "I don't want the map," cried Lancey, as the boy came forth; but he snatched the paper, threw down a shilling, and ran out into

the road and on towards Euston Square, never daring to stop lest fear should get the better of him and he should change his mind.

CHAPTER II.

THE EUSTON HOTEL.

Lancey reached it, got in front of the railway terminus, and looked right and left with a longing hope that he might see Don John glancing out at some window. His heart beat wildly, as if all the life he had was thumping at his left side. His hands trembled, his lips were white. What if after all there was some mistake!

But what mistake could there be?

Don John had written obscurely, but that was because he was afraid of being found out. Lancey had written a letter to his adopted parents, setting forth that he longed to see the world, and so—he had

run away. But Don John would have had time now to put that and the stealing of the ten sovereigns together. He had no doubt jumped to the right conclusion, and would save him ; but Lancey did not relish having to face him. Whenever he had committed any peculations, it was Don John who was sick with shame and rage, not only with fear of detection, which was what Lancey felt, but with horror at the deed itself.

He had written his own name on a card, and though he was full of hope, yet the dread of what Don John would say, and of what he might have risked in order to bring about this interview made Lancey tremble.

“ Is there a young gentleman waiting here for me ? ” he asked of the porter.

“ What is the young gentleman’s name ? ” was the not unnatural answer.

Lancey hesitated, sank into the one chair

which graced the vestibule, and gave it, “Master Donald Johnstone.”

A young woman, who was seated in a kind of glass case, began to examine some books.

“No, sir,” she shortly answered, “we have no such name here.”

Perhaps Don John had not dared to give his own name. Lancey now felt that he must follow the directions given.

“I was asked to give this card, and inquire for No. 16.”

“No. 16! Ah, yes, sir, that’s it,” exclaimed a waiter, starting forward almost with alacrity, and taking the card. “Yes, sir; follow me, if you please.”

Lancey rose to follow, but slowly. It seemed to him that the young person who had searched the books looked at him with amusement, and that the porter at the door was observant too. He was taken upstairs and along some almost interminable pas-

sages ; then a door was opened ; he was announced,—“ Mr. Lancelot Aird,” and turning from a table in the window, and coming slowly on as if not to startle him, he saw, not Don John—but, *the lodger*.

“ There’s some mistake ! ” exclaimed Lancey aghast, and starting back.

“ No, there’s no mistake,” she answered, looking at him with that never-to-be-forgotten expression in her eyes. “ No ; ‘twas, I that advertised,—Lancey ! ”

Something indescribable in her face and in her manner astonished him almost to the point of making him forget why he had come.

She had passed between him and the door. She leaned against it, and held the handle, while he sank into a chair.

“ Lancey,” she began again, and said no more. The silence that followed was so full of wonderment to Lancey that no words, he felt, could add to it whatever.

those words might be. And yet they did give him a kind of shock, she said them with such difficulty and such distress.

“I saw you take it,” she whispered, after that pause.

“Lancey, I saw you open my desk and steal the ten sovereigns; and I—I am as miserable as you are.”

Lancey looked at her as she still stood supporting herself against the door. He was subdued by her paleness, by the distress and misery in her voice, and the yearning in her face. He burst into tears.

O, it appeared so long before she spoke again!

“I want to save you. Do you know why?”

“Do I know why?” he repeated, almost in a whisper. “No.”

He looked at her, and his heart seemed to whisper to him what this meant. He

put out both his hands as if to entreat her not to come nearer to him yet.

“I took those lodgings in Salisbury’s house that I might see you—only you,” she continued.

“Why should you care about me?” he burst out. “I don’t know you. What are you to me?”

“Your mother.”

Yes! He was almost sure now that this was what he had foreseen—this was what he had known she would say.

He trembled from head to foot; the ten sovereigns were far away now, lost in a wild whirl of disaster, and grief, and change.

“I can’t love any other mother than that one at home,” he said bitterly.

She answered, in a piercing tone of distress and remonstrance, “But you have run away from her, my Lancey. And could she forgive you if she knew all?”

“I cannot say.”

“But I do know—and I do forgive—and I will forget. Only repent, my son, my only dear; or you’ll break my heart.”

“I have repented. Oh, forgive me, and let me go! I have left them all, and lost them. But—”

“But you cannot take me instead. I know it. You cannot love me all on a sudden.”

Lancey was too much astonished and agitated to arrange the many thoughts which were soon to press for utterance. Only one came to the front, and he uttered it.

“It is late in my life for you to ask me to love you for the first time.”

“Yes,” she sighed.

She stood pale and mournful of aspect and leaned against the door. He knew that her distress for his fault was overpowering the joy of recovering him.

He revolved in his mind the circumstance, and vaguely gazed about him at the common-place room, the common-place woman only distinguished from many others by the over-richness of her dress, and the fineness of her gold ornaments. Nothing helped him.

And she said she was his mother ! Which was best ? to run away to the docks and see what ships were like, and make trial of the hardships of the sea ; or to bind her to secrecy, and let her save him as she had said ?

It was easy, this last plan. It was a respite ; but he felt instinctively, for he was not calm enough for any decided thoughts—he felt that to run away bore with it the blessed possibility of coming home again and being forgiven. But to stay as her son was to give up this home, he could not have both. Then he looked at her, and for the moment was even more

sorry for her than for himself. And he rose and came towards her, for this Lancey was not always to act basely and with unkindness. He dried away his tears.

“But I know very well that you love me now,” he said, with her last word still ringing in his ears. “You would like to kiss me, wouldn’t you?” and he bent his fresh young cheek to her lips.

She kissed him, and with what joy and gratitude no words can tell. Holding him for a moment round the neck,—“Promise you won’t run away from me,” she entreated.

“No, I will not.” Then astonishment getting the better of his emotion, he went on, “You—no, I need not fear that you will betray me. But if you are my mother, how comes it that my own—I mean my other father and mother—do not know you?”

"Mr. Johnstone does know," she answered, sobbing. "When I met him in the fields I saw that he recognized me. So then you know nothing at all about me, Lancey?"

She trembled. She was seated on a chair next to him now, had taken his hand, and was pressing it to her heart. He scarcely cared about this, or noticed it. He perceived that he was saved, but then he was lost! This mother who had found him would want to keep him, and she could never be admitted as an equal in the adopted mother's home.

"I know nothing but that your name is Collingwood," he answered, with a sigh.

"O yes! my name is Collingwood. You know nothing more, my son? Think."

She looked intently at him, and he added,—

"They said that my father's name was Aird, and after his death that you

married again.” It’s quicker than lightning. I have no time to think, was his reflection, and he held up his hands to his head.

“Yes, but nothing more?” she asked.

“Nothing, but that you never wrote to me, which we thought was strange.”

“We?”

“Don John and I.” Then there was a pause, and they both wept.

“Can’t you say *Mother* to me, Lancey?”

“No,” said Lancey, dejectedly. “I love the other one. I don’t mean—I don’t wish to love any but her.”

“But surely—” she sighed as if deeply wounded—“surely you are thankful to be saved?”

A lump seemed to rise in Lancey’s throat then, and he trembled even more than she did.

“I am not saved,” he answered hoarsely; “I don’t wish to say anything wicked to you. Let me alone, or I shall.”

"I'll only say one thing, then," she persisted. "That ten pounds: you are welcome to it. Consider that I gave it to you. It is yours."

Lancey's chest heaved, there certainly was some relief in that sigh.

Presently she spoke again.

"I heard what you wrote in your letter to Mrs. Johnstone—all the servants and children know—that you had run away to sea. Nothing could be like the astonishment of them all. I think it was as good a thing as you could have said; and so, when I got here, I said the same thing, that my son had run off to sea; but I said I hoped you would come and take leave of me, and I bribed the waiters to look out for you."

Oh! what a world of difference there was between this speech and anything that had ever been said to him in his lost and forfeited home.

But it suited poor Lancey, and he gradually became calmer. He was to be aided with this lie that concealed a theft. She hoped by means of it to conciliate and make him lovingly dependent on her; and he, by the same means, hoped to pass for nothing worse than an extremely ungrateful, bad, and foolish schoolboy, to obtain forgiveness and get away from her. Each was subtle enough to conceal such thoughts. Lancey at once determined that he would try to be more pleasant to her, and she began to throw out hints of projected visits to Paris and to Switzerland, which, without distinctly asking him to go with her, seemed to show that his company at home, or abroad, would always be a pleasure to her. A clock on the mantelpiece struck one. Now was the decisive moment.

“ You’ll stay and have your lunch with me, of course? ” she said.

"I suppose so," he answered dejectedly ; and then, on reflection, added, " If you please."

The colour came back to her face. She knew her game was won. She rang the bell, quietly ordered lunch for two, and added, but rather slowly, " And this young gentleman—my son—will sleep here to-night. I shall want a room for him near to mine."

The waiter tried, but not very successfully, to conceal his interest and amusement. Lancey, with a disconsolate air, was looking out of the window. Mrs. Collingwood put a small piece of paper in the waiter's hand, on which was some writing.

" You'll see that this goes at once ? "

" Yes, ma'am."

It was a telegram addressed to Mr. Johnstone, at his house in the country, and was thus expressed :—

" Sir, Master Lancelot Aird is with me

at the Euston Hotel; I await your wishes.
M. J. C."

As the lunch drew to its conclusion, Lancey became hopelessly restless. Mrs. Collingwood noticed this, and asked what he would like to do.

He had nothing to do. He had thought of going to see the beasts fed; but it was too early. Lancey brought out this plan in his most boyish and inconsequent fashion.

"But he had two green linnets and a little tortoise *in his lodgings*. He should like to have them with him at the hotel, for he had nothing to do."

Mrs. Collingwood said she would go with him and fetch them.

"And as I've got some money left," continued Lancey, sighing between almost every word; "money that you have given me now, I should like some more creatures. I saw a puppy at the shop yesterday—a

stunning one, a skye—and, perhaps, if I had it"—here a great many more sighs—"I shouldn't be so miserable."

So an open fly was hired, and Lancey appeared at his late lodgings to claim his property. His landlady was a good woman. She was pleased to see him with a fine lady, who thanked her for having been kind to her son.

"Does he owe you anything?" she asked.

"No, ma'am, nothing."

"Excepting for the castors," said Lancey.

"Well, now," exclaimed the landlady, "to think of your remembering that, sir; and to think of my forgetting!"

Mrs. Collingwood paid a shilling for the use of the castors, and generously forbore to take back the threepence change.

Lancey felt rather less forlorn when he reached the hotel again with his tortoise, his two linnets, a skye puppy, and some

wood and wire with which he meant to enlarge a cage for a starling, that he had added to his menagerie. He was very clever with his hands, and being much occupied, took no notice when a telegram was brought in for Mrs. Collingwood. It ran thus,—“I will be with you to-morrow morning, about ten o’clock.”

So after breakfast the next morning—a meal during which Lancey was still disconsolate—Mrs. Collingwood asked him if he did not wish to see Mr. Johnstone, and ask his pardon for having run away.

Lancey said “Yes,” but not with any hope that this wish would so soon be realized. In two minutes the waiter announced Mr. and Mrs. Johnstone. A tall lady entered, and with a jealous pang, Maria Collingwood saw her boy rush up to her.

“Oh, mother—mother!” he cried. His face was on her bosom, and her hand

rested on his forehead. “Ask father to forgive me,” he cried.

His arm was round her neck, and she kissed him. How beautiful she was, how motherly, how tall. The other woman looked and envied her from the bottom of her soul; her face was coloured with agitation, and her eyes flashed. She had but vaguely noticed, she was scarcely aware of Mrs. Collingwood’s presence; but Mr. Johnstone was, he walked up to her, as she sat slightly turning away from the unbearable sight of her Lancey’s love for another mother.

“How much does that boy know?” he inquired, looking steadily at her, and speaking low.

“Nothing, sir—”

“Nothing?”

“I have told him that I am his mother, sir,” she whispered, “but nothing else; nothing at all.”

Donald Johnstone turned ; Lancey had made a step or two towards him, but before he took any other notice of him, he said,—

“ Set your mother a chair.”

“ Yes, father,” said Lancey.

And as Mrs. Johnstone sat down she made a slight movement of recognition to Mrs. Collingwood, who was keenly aware that her Lancey was standing humble and crestfallen for what seemed a long time before the adopted father, whose steady, penetrative eyes appeared to look him through and through.

It seemed a long time, but it could not have been many seconds. When he did speak his face changed, and his voice, which was low, trembled with impassioned emotion.

“ Have I ever denied you any one thing that was good for you all your life long ? ”

“ No, father.”

“ Have I made any difference between you and the dearest of my dear sons ? ”

“ No, father.”

“ Look at me.”

Lancey lifted up his daunted face, and looked entreatingly at his judge.

“ Your mother, as we drove along this morning, begged me to forgive you, Lancey, —*for running away.*”

Lancey’s eyes fell.

The steady, clear emphasis imparted to those last words shook him, and frightened Mrs. Collingwood no less. There was more meaning in them than met the ear. How could he have discovered what she only had seen? And if he had not, what did he suspect?

He sighed deeply.

“ For running away,” he repeated; “ and I said—I would.”

Another pause.

“ Have I anything else to forgive you for? ”

Lancey’s head was bent, as he stood, but

he murmured something in his fright and confusion. It seemed to be "No."

Then the other mother spoke. She said, "Oh, yes, my Lancey; yes. Your father has to forgive you for long distrust of his anxious goodness, and care for you. If you were unhappy at home, why didn't you say so? If you longed so much for a sea life, why did you never tell it even to me? Why have you done this to us? We deserved better things of you, Lancey. You have been ungrateful and unkind."

He does know, thought Mrs. Collingwood, and she does not.

Lancey was completely overcome. He staggered as he stood, and in another instant the adopted father was holding him by the shoulder; he made him sit down, and unfastened his necktie. As he bent over him to do this, Mrs. Collingwood saw Lancey lean his forehead for a moment against Mr. Johnstone's breast.

" You won't tell mother ? " he faltered. And Mrs. Collingwood heard the words with a passion of jealous pain. Of course he did not care that *she* knew.

She heard the whispered " No." Then she saw him put his hand on her boy's head. He said,—

" May God forgive you, my poor child, and grant you time to retrieve the past."

A silence followed. The adopted mother and the true mother both wept. Lancey, now the terrible ordeal was over, felt almost as if he was in his former place, and was going to his home as if nothing was changed, but yet the many strange things that had come to pass flashing back on his memory, enabled him quickly to overcome his emotion.

" Mother," he burst out, addressing Mrs. Johnstone, " this—this lady says that she came home from Australia on purpose to see *me*. She says she is—"

"*She says she is your mother,*" said Mrs. Johnstone. "Well, my son, you always knew that I was not; we always told you that you were a dear adopted son."

"You won't let her take me from you?"

"Lancey," cried Mrs. Collingwood, "I have been very good to you, and this I cannot stand. But for me, you would have been on shipboard by this time."

"Father," repeated Lancey, "you won't let her take me from you?"

"No," he answered, just as decidedly as if the whole matter was in his own hands.

"Sir, you may find that I have something to say as to that," sobbed poor Mrs. Collingwood.

"I have no doubt of it," he replied, "and now is the time to say it. If Mrs. Johnstone will let Lancey take her to his sleeping-room, you can speak as you could not in the presence of the boy, and I can tell you my intentions."

Still taking in all respects the upper hand, he was soon left alone with Mrs. Collingwood, and while she dried her eyes, he said,—

“Mrs. Collingwood, I am sorry to begin with a disparaging question. You went away declaring that you did not know, and had no means of knowing, which of those two children was yours—how is it that you come back, to the full as sure as we are, if not more so?”

No answer.

“This certainty of yours almost ties me down to the thought that you did know always; but that in an unworthy hour you yielded to your husband’s desire to get rid of your child, and made up a story which you knew would provide him with a kind father, and a better mother than you had been.”

“No, sir,” she replied, moving her hand as if to put all this aside, “don’t.”

“ How is it, then ? ”

“ I came to see which you had chosen, and the moment I set my eyes on Lancey, I felt—I was sure—I could have sworn that he was my son. I loved him so. I knew that you were right. I saw your son, sir, several times first, and felt that I didn’t like him, that he was nothing to me. But Lancey—oh, sir ! you *know* he’s mine as well as I do.”

“ I *believe* he is, so does Mrs. Johnstone.”

“ I have plenty, sir. My husband’s—Collingwood’s—relations in Australia left him four hundred a year; they had been so prosperous. It all came by David’s will to me.”

“ That I have nothing to do with.”

“ Sir ? ”

“ You can leave it to Lancey, if you please ; but that is nothing to me.”

“ I am ever deeply thankful for all you

have done for my Lancey. You have made a gentleman of him ; but I meant, sir, that of course I should wish to take him off your hands now, and finish educating of him, and provide for him myself.”

“ Quite impossible.”

“ How so, sir.”

“ You cannot prove that the boy is yours.”

“ Prove it ?—no, of course not.”

“ Nothing on earth but proof will do for me. That it is to the last and uttermost *improbable* he can be mine, I fully admit ; but I will not give him up unless you can prove that it is *impossible*.”

“ Why, you have five, Mr. Johnstone—five beside him—and I have none.”

“ The thing is entirely your own doing.”

“ But my poor husband, Collingwood, had no doubt in the world ; when, after some years—we had plenty of money and no children, and he so fond of me—I told

him at last everything. How I concealed from poor mother and denied that I had changed the children, and so—”

“And so she did it herself; yes, probably.”

“Oh, you’ll let me have my boy, then?”

“No, never.”

“I’m a miserable woman; but there’s law. I take the law of you, sir.”

“You are talking nonsense; there is no law for such a case; and if you make it public, you will cover yourself with disgrace, and make your son detest you; we have never told him anything at all against you. To the utmost of my ability, I am bringing him up as I would if it was proved to me that he was mine; and whether he is to be my honour or my disgrace, so help me God, I will never forsake him.”

CHAPTER III.

DONALD JOHNSTONE'S words, no less than his manner, which seemed to announce no doubt whatever that he both could and would keep her boy, were too much for poor Maria Collingwood. She wept passionately, but she was highly irritated also. " You're extremely unforgiving and hard upon me," she sobbed ; " and, as for Mrs. Johnstone, if I had been the dirt under her feet, she could hardly at first have taken less account of me."

" She did not see you. She was thinking of the boy ; and she never said one word of reproach to you when she did see you."

" She was very high—very, and it hurt

my feelings—before Lancey and all. She's not so very much above me *now*."

"Listen to reason, Mrs. Collingwood, and acknowledge what you very well know, that my wife is immeasurably above you. She has been as noble as you were base. She has never said one word against you to the child through whom you wrought her for some years such unutterable pain."

"They can't both be yours," sobbed the poor woman;—she still remonstrated.

"They are both mine in one sense, and in the same sense neither can ever be yours; for if you gave me any serious trouble about this matter (which I am sure you will not do), I should tell Lancey—the one whom you want—the whole story. He would probably believe himself to be yours. I leave you to judge what he would think of you compared with the woman who has brought him up. But it is possible that he might do worse; he might, spite of all

that *we* think, entertain a lurking fancy that, after all, he had the best of rights to every single thing we have done for him. And what chance would you have of anything but hatred and repulsion from him in such a case as that?"

"It is but right—*you'll own it's right*—that I should see him sometimes," she sobbed, when she had pondered this last speech.

"Yes, I own it; and if you will do my bidding, I will make this thing as little bitter to you as I can."

"I had not left him in your parlour in Harley Street a day—not one day—before my heart began to cry for him; not but what I truly was in doubt then, sir. But David—he was so jealous of the child, and I was that desirous to please him, and that he should not have the expense of his bringing up! It was years after, when he got fonder and fonder of me, that I re-

lieved my mind with telling him all—and he did so reproach me ! ‘ If you’d had a mother’s heart,’ said he, ‘ you would have known there was no reasonable doubt ; and now,’ said he, ‘ I want that child of yours ’ (that was when he was ill), ‘ since I’ve none,’ said he, ‘ of my own ! ’

“ But I give way, sir ; I did wrong ; and if you won’t tell him anything against me, I’ll do my best to be patient. You’ll let me see him sometimes ? ”

“ I will ; and now I am afraid I have to ask you a question which will give you pain. His father, Lancelot Aird—”

“ Yes, sir.”

“ Well, the thing must be said. Did he ever get himself into trouble, as they call it ? —was he ever taken up for any—larceny ? ”

The colour rushed over her face and neck, and she drew herself up, and darted a reproachful look at him.

"I think you will do well to answer," he said.

"He was in trouble once—only once," she whispered. "Oh, sir, I know—my poor boy!"

"It seems as if it must be hereditary," he murmured. "What do you know, Mrs. Collingwood?"

She was silent, and shook her head.

"It is said that you were robbed three days ago."

Still she was silent.

"When my own dear boy found that Lancey had run away, he was naturally very much distressed, and told me Lancey had no real desire to go to sea. He also confessed to me something which had happened some years ago at school, which instantly excited a terrible suspicion in my mind. I could not but perceive what my boy thought, as I now perceive that you understand me."

"I promised him I would not betray him," said the poor, shamed, and sorrowful woman.

"Then, Mrs. Collingwood, I must myself make him confess all."

But there proved to be no need for this. Mrs. Collingwood, with all her faults, was not a foolish woman ; she soon was made to feel that the boy's best chance of being cured of his propensity and duly looked after lay in his being under Mr. Johnstone's supervision. She gave way. She would part with him then and there, only she begged that she might not have to see Mrs. Johnstone again.

Lancey was therefore sent for to return to the room he had left, a little note from Mr. Johnstone asking his wife to remain where she was. Accordingly, Lancey appeared, but it was with an altogether new expression on his face. He looked dejected and ashamed, but the craven air was gone.

He walked straight up to Mr. Johnstone. “Father,” he said, “I have confessed it all. I have told mother everything.”

When Maria Collingwood heard this, she felt as if Lancey was saved, but yet that he was all the more lost to her. She had now no hold; the other woman was supreme, and she was nothing.

“And she has forgiven me,” proceeded Lancey, in a whisper.

“May God forgive you, my boy,” answered Donald Johnstone, solemnly, “and bring you to a better mind. Understand me.”

“No, father,” Lancey burst out; “I am not daring to ask *you* to forgive me yet; but I will—I will do better.”

“Understand me,” Donald Johnstone went on, “I am disgraced. Your wickedness is undiscovered as yet; but I am amazed with the shame of it, and I feel that I shall not be able to hold up my head as I have done.”

“ Oh, father !” Lancey interrupted again, “ don’t say it. Have pity on me.”

“ For better or for worse, I and mine are so far one that we must rise or sink together. I have a thing now to hide. When I meet my neighbours—especially my poor neighbours—I shall hope they will not find it out. I shall be ashamed—I am ashamed.”

“ Father, I cannot bear it.”

“ And nobody but us knows,” murmured Maria Collingwood ; but happily poor Lancey cared nothing for her opinion. The only severe punishment he had ever suffered in his life was now being inflicted on him, and he felt it most keenly.

“ Will there never be a day when you can forgive me, father ?” he sighed.

“ Oh, yes, I can forgive you even now ; but not the less I know that you are on the very brink of ruin, as I am liable at any moment to your being detected and my being disgraced.”

After this, though Maria Collingwood perceived the salutary contrition it had wrought on Lancey, she hated Mrs. Johnstone and Mr. Johnstone too ; for Lancey could not think about her—could not care that she had to part from him ; could not even take thought for his birds, and his tortoise, and his skye puppy, which he had hitherto been making so much of.

Nothing that concerned her signified much. He knew he had been wicked, but he felt it most because the other mother had wept over her adopted son, and he felt the shame of what he had done because of the words of his adopted father.

“ Oh, to save them for the future ! Oh, to lead a better life ! ” That was what Lancey felt now ; and when Mr. Johnstone drew him aside, and told him that he was to part from this poor mother of his, and he was to do it affectionately, he could hardly give his mind to it, though he was

left alone with her. But her distress was like his distress, though it was from a different cause.

“It’s hard, my son,” she sobbed, “to come from the other side the earth to see you, and then find (I have plenty of friends there) that you neither care to go back with me, nor to stay with me here.”

He was deep in his own painful thoughts, and made her no reply.

“But you’ll call me ‘*mother*’ once, won’t you, Lancey?”

“Yes, I will, mother; you have been kind.”

“I did the best I could.”

“But I don’t understand it at all, mother.”

“And I mayn’t explain it to you. No; I know it would do no good to explain it to you.” He was not listening, and she forbore to go on; but as she sat beside him on a sofa, she drew his head for a few

moments on to her bosom, and he allowed her to hold it there.

"Lancey," she whispered, "if you get into a scrape again—"

"I never will," he answered, and groaned.

"But if you did, my own only one, you'd come to me, wouldn't you, to get you out of it?"

"Yes," was the answer. She waited some moments for it. Then releasing him, he lifted his face. "Good-bye, *mother*," he said. She kissed him, and in another moment he was gone.

Poor woman! She looked out of the window, and saw Mrs. Johnstone step forth from the hotel and enter a carriage which was waiting; and then, Lancey having got in, she gazed at him, till the reins were given to Mr. Johnstone, and they drove off, and the carriage and her treasure disappeared.

He had left all his pets behind, and as

they had consoled him while he sat disconsolate in his lodgings, so they consoled her a little. She took to the starling most, because she had seen her boy at work on his cage. She let the puppy set his little white teeth in the trains of her gowns, and worry her slippers, and drag her knitting over the floor; and she thought about Lancey, and felt how lonely she was, and considered, as many another has done, not only how she could have been such a sinner, but such a fool.

And now, having made voluntary confession so far, the boy's involuntary confession of other delinquencies was soon made to follow. Don John had told his father of the suspicions which had fallen on Lancey, owing to certain petty peculations, and then of the more serious theft, followed by his own adventure and his broken arm.

After this, as Don John believed, all had gone well. He had hoped that Lancey

was cured ; and yet when it was found that he had run away, just after the ten pounds had been stolen, he could not help dwelling on the recollection that “the lodger’s” room had been entered by Lancey for a moment in order to bring away a book.

But why—Mr. Johnstone pondered—why had he done this ? He was not a child now, that he could thoughtlessly yield to temptation not knowing the consequences. He had felt the fear of detection, and the bitterness of danger already. So far as was known he did not care to hoard ; could he have risked so much misery that he might have ten pounds to squander away ?

Thinking thus, and pursuing his advantage now that Lancey was penitent and crestfallen, Mr. Johnstone pressed him with questions. One admission soon led to another. Lancey did not dare to prevaricate, and very soon the miserable story

of his last fall found out by the boy who was now his tyrant was told. He had concealed this from Don John as he now declared because he could not bear to be despised by him. Don John had no idea of the misery he had gone through, constant threats of exposure hanging over his head.

“And it can never be put an end to,” sighed poor Lancey; “he will soon write to me again.”

“Oh yes, it can be put an end to. Where is his last letter?” asked Mr. Johnstone. “Did you leave it behind in your desk?”

“No, father, I was afraid it would be found. He is at the seaside now, and when I got the post-office order for him, I put it in my pocket to be sure that I sent it to the right address.”

“Give it to me.”

Lancey produced it, and Donald Johnstone having read it sealed it up. “Now you can write to this fellow,” he said. “Tell

him you have made full confession of everything to your father, who has taken his last letter from you. ‘He remarked,’ you can say ‘that at first he thought of sending that letter to your father, but that on second thoughts if you at once wrote to me promising that under no circumstances should I ever hear from you again, he should not do so—for if your father was an honourable man, it would make him miserable, while you were too old to be flogged, and no other punishment was likely to reach you.’”

Lancey looked amazed, but he wrote the letter, and of course was delivered from that form of bondage ever after, but he had a good deal to endure. It was soon explained to him that he could not go to school again with Don John, or indeed to any school. He was not to be trusted, he might disgrace himself and the family that had adopted him. “Father always used

to say that Don John and I should both be articled to him," he remarked to Mrs. Johnstone.

"So you shall," she answered, "if he has every reason to believe you are quite cured. I pray to God every day, Lancey, that you may be cured."

Mrs. Johnstone in fact never admitted the least doubt that he would be cured. She was ardently hopeful, and always loving; taught him a prayer against his besetting sin which he promised to say night and morning, and did all she could to make him ashamed of his propensity and afraid of himself.

But Lancey was not taken home, he was sent to be the private pupil of a clergyman, to whom his fault was duly confided, and who watched him, prayed with him, and also taught him. It was not so pleasant as being at school with Don John and many other boys for com-

panions, but he was there shielded from temptation, and he also knew and felt that he was watched. Besides the frequent letters both from father and from mother had some effect upon him, while every now and then his new mother as he called her wrote to him by permission, and always sent him a very handsome “tip,” which, by way of being candid and truthful, he mentioned in his letters home; he had thus always plenty of money, as well as absence of temptation, and he appeared to himself to loathe the sin of theft, because the constraint and distrust it had brought upon him were always in his way.

He longed for his home, and even for his sisters and Charlotte, whom he had not specially cared for; but at the end of the year he did not go home.

The Johnstones came as they had done several times already to see their adopted son, and brought Don John with them;

and they told him he should take a tour with them and Don John on the continent, but that they could not let him be with his sisters, and close to the scene of his last delinquency at present.

So he was still during these holidays to be exclusively with those who knew of his faults. Well, he thought, he did not much care—anything to get away from this dull place, and if he was still to be exhorted, to enjoy at least a change of exhortation.

Lancey was grown, and was a fine, good-looking fellow. There was something not unpleasing to him in the deep, loving anxiety of them all for his welfare. It made him so important; and as his moral sense was weak, he did not despise or reproach himself so much as to diminish his enjoyment of the holiday tour. He had done very wrong. It would have been strange if after so many tears, such fervent prayers, such tender letters, such

loving care, so much as this had not been impressed on his mind. He said to himself that he should never do such a thing as that again *of course*. The consequences had been very unpleasant and the risk very great. Besides father had taken great pains to let him know that he would never be poor—never want, for that he should leave him a provision by no means to be despised; and the new mother had expressly told him that everything she had would be his.

Lancey was seventeen years old and perfectly cured in the opinion of everybody when at length his eyes lighted on his old home again, and he saw with delight and surprise the two grown-up sisters, and Charlotte, and the old garden, and the still prized and unaltered playroom.

He might have come home a year ago, but that the so-called “new mother” pleaded so sorely to have him during the

midsummer vacation, that she was allowed to do so. She crammed as many pleasures as she could think of for him into the time, and sent him back loaded with presents, but to her sore discomfort he was just as urgent the following year to be allowed to go home as she had been to be allowed to see him. Home he went accordingly, and was every hour aware that it was a different home. There had been a tiresome, shy child in that former home called Charlotte—a child who teased him and whom he teased, that child's frock was always crumpled, her hair, like a mat or a bird's nest as he had loved to declare, used to hang over her forehead; she often pouted. He remembered that she had always possessed most beautiful blue Irish eyes with long black lashes, and that he had not cared about them the least in the world.

Charlotte—well, this was Charlotte now

—Don John called her five feet nothing—in fact, she was a small creature and looked specially so among the tall young Johnstones.

Charlotte, the morning after Lancey came home, was sitting at the schoolroom table writing, her rosebud mouth pouting, and her lashes hiding the blueness beneath. What a pretty little figure she had.

Charlotte was very youthful looking; Don John, only seventeen, looked much older. Charlotte was his little slave, and still his partner in the *minutes*. Lancey rather wondered to see him order her about. He observed what a charming air and manner she had—how the small waist was graced with an ample chatelaine. He thought she had a pretty gown on, and admired the little feet which in their trim slippers were perched on the cross-bar under the table.

“Poetess!” the voice of Don John was

heard to shout from the garden below. Charlotte was too deep in thought to answer—her fingers were inked. She took up a bit of blotting-paper and dried them on it, and looked at the tips of them, but as if her thoughts were far away. Her lips moved. “She’s muttering her poetry,” thought Lancey, very much amused, and in another moment Don John burst in. “Wasting the morning in this way, Charlotte,” he exclaimed; “and Lancey has never even seen the new pony carriage.” Charlotte turned her dreamy eyes upon him and gradually woke up. “Here you sit all in a bunch with your shoulders up to your ears—like a yellow-hammer singing on a rail—what are you doing?—some of your rubbish of course.”

“I was only putting a bit of Chaucer into modern English, for the minutes.”

“Modern fiddlesticks!—come on Lancey, and you too, Charlotte. They’ve found

three snakes in the dairy, and one of them was drinking the milk." Charlotte sighed, she was writing of thoughts and things which had never come near her yet, excepting in a poetic vision.

"I must copy it out first," she said, "or I shall never remember how it goes."

Don John sat down to wait with a tolerably good grace, and he too came in for a share of Lancey's observation.

Don John would have been a difficult person to describe to one who had not seen him—he was neither short nor tall, he was neither handsome nor plain, he was not graceful, he was not awkward. He had extremely light hair, light eye-brows, a specially open, sweet-tempered expression, a good many freckles about his face and on his hands, extremely white teeth, and twinkling eyes full of fun. In manner, he was blunt, in behaviour to his sisters he was affectionate, but peremptory—as yet

it was firmly fixed in his mind that “the masculine gender is worthier than the feminine;” he was lord and master at home, reigned over Charlotte more despotically than over any of the others—scarcely perceived at present that she was grown up, admired and loved his mother above all creatures, and looked on most young ladies not related to him, as mistakes of nature and bores.

Charlotte with her pretty head on one side and her eyebrows slightly elevated, copied out her version.

“ Still for your sake—by night I wake—
and sigh,

By day I am near—so sore my fear—
to die,

And to all this—no care I wis—ye
deign,

Though mine eyes two—never for you—
be dry;

And on your ruth—and to your truth—
I cry.

But well away—too far be they—to
attain,

So plaining me—on destiny—amain,
I mourn, nor find—how to unbind—my
chain,

Knowing my wit—so weak is it—all
vain.

Think on your name—why do (for
shame)—ye so,

For it shall be—thou shalt this dree—
sweet foe,

And me think on—in such wise gone—
this day,

That love you best—(God, Thou wottest)
—alway.”

A deep groan from Don John. “Oh, very
well,” exclaimed Charlotte, “if I am not
to finish it now, I never shall.”

"Of all the unreasonableness in this world," replied Don John, "there's no unreasonableness like that of you people who pretend to be poets." He looked round the room. "And what's the good of poetry?" he burst forth.

Charlotte felt a certain fitness in Don John's honest indignation and sincere scorn; she wiped her pen.

"I never said it was any good," she pleaded—"only I cannot help writing it."

"Even when there are snakes in the dairy! and you are expressly told of it."

"Yes, I do want to see the snakes," said Charlotte. "Why do you try to make out that I don't care about interesting things?"

CHAPTER IV.

THE young people now ran down into the dairy, where three snakes were twisting themselves about under a wire meat-safe, while Marjorie and Naomi, standing well away from it with their backs against the wall, held their skirts with needless care, and regarded the silvery things with distrust and curiosity.

Little Mary, the only creature about the place who could still be considered a child, was perched upon the slate shelf.

Lancey and Don John poked slender skewers between the wires of the safe, and Charlotte no sooner heard the snakes hiss in acknowledgment of this attention than

she sprang on the top of a covered bread-pan, and demanded to be saved, to be set on the shelf beside Mary, to be got out of their way.

“They’re perfectly harmless,” said Mary, looking down from her elevation with complacency; but she took special care to keep high above them.

Charlotte, by the help of Lancey’s hand, perched herself beside Mary, and began to feel safe and brave till the cook, coming in, said to Don John,—

“I hope, sir, you are certain sure there are no more of the artful things lurking about on the top shelf?”

“The top shelf!” cried Charlotte, “how could there be any there?”

“Oh, no,” said Don John, “there are no more; and, besides, I told you they were perfectly harmless.”

The cook put her hand on her side. “No peace have I had in this place at all,”

she remarked, “since you said, sir, it was a pop’ler error,—‘Cook,’ you said, ‘it’s a pop’ler error to think of a snake as if it couldn’t glide up a steep slope.’ I’ve been in here for milk and eggs times out of number as innocent as could be, and have heard a kind of rustling, and little thought the deceitful things were perhaps lolling their heads over and looking at me.”

All the girls shivered in sympathy.

“But there it is, young ladies, when once you let yourself down—begging your pardon for saying it—let yourself down to go into the country (being London-born and one that ought to know better), why, you can never tell what may happen.”

“Hiss—s—s” again.

“And me always taught that they lived in dung-hills, the only proper place for them, and then to hear that Mr. Don John with his own hands, pulled two out of Mrs. Clarboy’s thatch, that they used to

climb up to by the ivy—and found a long string of leathery eggs as well—such a respectable woman as Mrs. Clarboy is too!"

"They didn't require a reference as to character when they went to lodge there," said Don John.

"And hadn't need, sir," cried the cook, smiling. "I should hope the wickedest family that ever lived was too good for such reptilly things as they."

"Mrs. Clarboy's roof comes down at the back of her house to within three feet of the ground, and the old ivy is almost as thick as tree trunks, they got up it both here and there; a snake must be a fool indeed if he cannot climb that."

"Instead of which he is rather cunning," observed Lancey.

"Yes," said Charlotte, knitting her pretty brow into a thoughtful frown, "cunning, but not so cunning as to lead one to any painful doubts or speculations.

I have never supposed that snakes were reasonable creatures."

Lancey looked up surprised. "Reasonable creatures!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, it's only one of her theories she's alluding to," said Don John, "read our *minutes*, and you'll see."

The cook now retired, having certain matters to attend to, and Don John, having managed to push a flat piece of tin under the wires, carried away the snakes. Marjorie and Naomi followed, but Lancey had found some curds on a dish and set it between Charlotte and Mary, who were still perched on the shelf, and, helping himself also, sat down on a wooden stool, and thought how pretty Charlotte looked. Charlotte, in one respect much resembled her mother, her mind was full of speculations, and in general she was ready to discuss any of them with any person at any time.

Lancey wanted to hear her talk, so he said, "How about the reasonable creatures?"

"Oh," answered Charlotte, "I think that though we are in this globe at the head of the reasonable creatures, there are at least two other races that have reason and are able to commit sin."

"Queer!" thought Lancey. Her speech had so much surprised him that he had attended to it, no less than to the well-favoured face that looked down earnestly at him, and to the shapely curves of her lips.

"Do you think they are responsible, then?" he exclaimed.

"I said 'can commit sins,' so I suppose they are responsible—ants, for instance."

"They're so small," pleaded Lancey, amazed.

"They are not in any degree worth mentioning smaller than we are—I mean with relation to the size of the globe on

which we live and they live. In my own mind the more I think it over the more I feel that I ought not to shrink from the notion that they are responsible creatures."

"But what are their sins, Charlotte?"

"They go to war, planning murderous raids beforehand, they take slaves in battle, both living ants which they make slaves, and eggs which they hatch, and bring up the young as thralls—as subject races. But what makes me mainly sure that they are responsible is that they are punished just as we are, but more severely, through these very crimes. The eagle is not punished for stealing the lamb and picking out its eyes. The pike, for anything we can find out to the contrary, swallows a whole family of young fishes, and does not know he's a cannibal. They are not punished, but the ants are, for having used themselves to be fed, cleaned, and waited on by their slaves, they absolutely lose the

power to do these things for themselves, so that if the slaves get away or die, they die too."

"And why may not all that be instinct?" said Lancey, cogitating.

"If it were—which still I think it cannot be—what do you say to their having domestic animals just as we have? We have tame creatures, flocks that yield us milk; so have they."

"It's queer certainly," said Lancey.

"If they were as large as we are, it would seem queerer still; we were ignorant of it all for a very long time because they are so small. But only fancy, Lancey, if they were as large as bullocks, and we met them every now and then driving their unlucky prisoners home, taking them to their underground dens and keeping them there, what a queer sensation it would give us! And then when we walked forth and saw them milking their flocks, the

question is, whether it would be more strange to us than to see us milking ours would be to them.”

“But if they have reason,” said Lancey, “why cannot they communicate with us?”

“I don’t know: most likely because one of their senses is different from ours, on purpose to keep us apart—they are deaf. I suppose if we had not only no hearing, but no consciousness of such a sense as hearing, we should have no real knowledge of one another, and none of other races.”

“Does one sense less, then, make all the difference?”

“Oh, I did not say one sense *less*. If we had the greater and more perfect faculty that they possess, we should be very superior to our present selves, and be able to communicate also with them. It is our disability that keeps us back, not theirs; and one strange difference must strike every one. Language, which we address

to the sense of hearing, often deceives—it is inadequate and often false as well—but that direct touch by means of which they communicate seems to cause the actual flow of one mind into the other. We have no reason to think it can deceive, we do not suppose that they can lie to one another. In a minor sense they may be said on touching to ‘know even as they are known.’ ”

“ Yes, but all insects communicate by the touch—are all responsible ? ”

“ Why should they be, any more than all beasts and birds are responsible because they can all hear ? ”

“ But I think if they are reasonable creatures,” said Lancey, “ it’s an odd thing that they *never try* to communicate with us.”

“ Do we ever make any systematic efforts to communicate with them ? ”

Lancey laughed, the question seemed hardly worth answering.

"And how do we know," continued Charlotte, "that they never have made efforts to communicate with us? They too may have come to the conclusion that we have reason. How do we know what little longing crafty signs they may, after long consultation, have put out, hoping to attract our notice?"

"They may wish to let us know," said Mary, "that they don't like to be trodden on. I never tread on them since Charlotte wrote of their ways in the minutes. Don John says perhaps the negro ants have found out that we have emancipated our negroes, and hope we shall some day by moral force get their masters to emancipate them."

"Yes," said Charlotte, who was very truthful, "but Don John only wrote that in the minutes for a joke. He has no sympathy at all with the movement —at least with my cogitations as to

how, if they have reason, we can possibly find out how to communicate with them. I ought not to call it a *movement* yet ! But is it not a most extraordinary thing, Lancey, that considering what millions of worlds Almighty God has made, and considering the almost infinite vastness of space, that He should appear to act as if space was very precious, and He wished to make the most of it ? How crowded this world is—every inch turned to account as it were ! So many races under, over, and beside one another. Only think, if all the suns and worlds and moons should be as full as our world is, and all different ! ”

“ It is strange,” answered Lancey. “ I suppose she will have a lover some day,” he thought; “ how it will *stump* that unlucky fellow, if she breaks forth to him in such discourse as this ! ”

“ And which do you think is the third race of reasonable creatures ? ” he asked.

"Oh," said Charlotte, "I think the observant mind often gets hints of some such race, but I do not think it is visible to our eyes as at present constituted. I mean a race not angelic nor demoniacal—but that we (knowing so little of it) are inclined as a rule to be afraid of."

"Oh!" said Lancey.

"They're skinned!" exclaimed Don John, putting his head in, and he and Lancey darted off together.

"Oh, you cruel boy!" exclaimed Charlotte, for she knew it was the snakes that had been referred to.

Then she and Mary jumped down from the shelf, and Charlotte went and finished the minutes.

Lancey, in spite of the joy with which he had looked forward to coming home, found that thorns which had grown up in his absence encompassed the roses there.

Things were now and then said which made him feel hot; he was not always so much at ease as he could have wished. There were some places that he did not want to visit, some people whom he did not care to see. And yet he would question with himself as to whether his brothers and sisters would not think it strange if he refrained from going to those very places, would not have their attention attracted towards him as acting oddly if he did not expressly seek those very people.

It was easy enough to go with Don John and see Lady Louisa, and hear her somewhat tedious talk about her children's delicate chests, and how she thought of spending the next winter at Nice, because Evelyn, the eldest son, had too long a neck.

Lancey bore a great deal of discussion as to sloping shoulders and the said long neck, almost with complacency. It stirred

no uneasy recollections. He rose up to be measured by Mr. Viser as a proof that he was not taller than Evelyn.

Then he and Don John stood an examination as to their health. Their experiences were mainly negative. They did not feel by any means disinclined for their breakfast. They did not feel giddy when they read. They never heard any drumming in their ears, and they did not lie awake at night.

Lady Louisa sighed.

Then Don John burst forth with,—

“If Evelyn had no work to do in the holidays, he would not feel giddy.”

Evelyn nudged Don John in a fitful, weak way, and Don John responded to the nudge by saying,—

“And German is one of the hardest things a fellow can have to get up.”

“Oh,” said Lady Louisa, “but Evelyn is devoted, perfectly devoted, to his Ger-

man, and to the Herr Professor ; he quite enjoys his eight hours a day."

Evelyn, fixed by his mother's eye, gave the answer expected of him, but added, with a natural sigh, and in a piping voice,—

"But I wanted to dig out those water-voles with *them*."

When Lady Louisa remonstrated, "But you would get your feet wet, my boy," the long-necked student succumbed, and Don John and Lancey made no observation.

The wild ass tossing his mane in the desert is so different from the flounder flopping on his mud-bank, that he cannot hope to understand him and his fashions.

"Wet his feet. Ugh!" thought Don John.

"I think Evelyn a very nice boy, poor fellow," said Charlotte, as they were walking home, "and extremely clever. I like him."

"Oh, yes, of course," answered Don

John. “‘ Like loves like,’ as the old maid said, when she bought the primrose. You’ll be an old maid, Charlotte, I know you will.”

“ Yes, I know I shall,” said Charlotte, a little ruefully. “ There’s no abstract reason but—”

“ Nonsense ! ” Lancey exclaimed ; “ why, Charlotte is as pretty as—as anything.”

Don John looked at Charlotte critically.

“ She’s just as pretty—you’re just as pretty as some girls who are sure to be married, Charlotte,” he remarked encouragingly. “ It’s not that.”

“ But you’ve often said I was improved since *Fetch* wrote me those letters,” said Charlotte.

Don John rejoined,—

“ Fetch is a sensible fellow. *I always thought there was a good deal in him.*”

“ He did not show his sense in wanting to alter Charlotte,” said Lancey, hotly, and

easily perceiving that Don John had written the letters himself.

" You don't know much about Charlotte yet. You've not heard her dash into abstract questions, and develope her theories to fellows when they come to call."

Here Charlotte blushed consciously, and Lancey laughed.

Then Don John said, "'What's the joke?' as the ghost asked of the laughing hyena. 'Dear sir,' he answered, 'you can't see a joke in the dark.' But is this fellow in the dark? Charlotte, your blushes testify against you! Mary, I now feel that I've done my duty by you—this is meant for a Sam Weller."

" Oh," said Mary, "it's very nice, Lancey, to hear him sometimes remember *poor* Fetch and Sam. Don John, you're so grand now you know you're to be articled to father directly—you hardly ever come into the playroom at all. When I sprained

my arm, you did Fetch for me every day, and Sam too—”

They were now close to the back of the house, and a piano was heard, together with two fresh young voices singing a duet. They were not both ladies' voices.

“There *he* is spooning again,” said Don John, “and Naomi playing for them. No, Mary, I am always telling you that I cannot do Sam Wellers for you whenever I please. But I'll dance three times with you round this geranium bed, if you like, to Naomi's tune. Now, then, ‘Do you polk?’ as the *Ornithorhyncus Paradoxus* said at an evening party when they introduced him to the blue-faced baboon.”

“And what did the blue-faced baboon say?”

“She replied that she would dance because she wished to conform to the usages of society, but that she preferred swinging from a bough by her tail, because that

amusement was so much more intellectual."

"How jolly he is!" thought Lancey, "nothing to conceal, nothing on his mind." "When are we going to see the people in the houses?" he asked aloud, for he was impelled by dislike to an inevitable visit, to have it over as soon as possible.

"Oh, whenever you like. Shall it be after lunch?"

So some time after lunch, Don John and Lancey, with Mary and Charlotte, set forth. Lancey would have felt more easy if they had been a larger party, but it appeared that there was important practising to be done. Two *tenors* and a *barytone* had arrived: each evidently thought his voice suited best with Marjorie's. Naomi stayed behind to play for them.

"And how does the new boiler do, Mrs. Clarboy?" asked Don John, when the first greetings were over, and Lancey had been

assured that he was almost grown out of knowledge.

“ Oh, sir, it goes lovely—lovely it does—but it’s rather slow of heating—shall I light it now, sir, and show you? ”

“ Yes, do, and Lancey, you sit on the top and let us know when the water boils. You won’t? Well, I never knew such a disobliging fellow! and when you’ve been away so long too.”

“ Master Don John, he’s always full of his jokes,” said Mrs. Clarboy.

“ And how is Miss Jenny to-day? ” asked Charlotte.

“ Thank you kindly for asking, miss; and pore Jenny feels herself better this afternoon. It’s a great comfort to her our niece being with us.” Here she made a show of introduction between Charlotte and a pretty young woman in a close cap. “ My niece Letty Fane, miss; she is a trained nurse, and understands Jenny’s

nerves. Yes, Letty was in a regular hospital, Miss Charlotte, but she has taken a situation in a workhouse now."

" You must find that a pleasant change," said Charlotte.

" Ma'am," answered the young woman, with an aggrieved air, " nothing of the sort, I find it very dull, there are no operations."

" But she thought it her duty to take the situation, having a widowed mother to help, and there being better pay," observed Mrs. Clarboy.

After this Letty Fane went upstairs, taking with her some food for the sick aunt, but her account of herself and her tastes had cast a chill over the guests, and Charlotte presently rose to take leave, Lancey alone remaining behind to slip a little present of money into Mrs. Clarboy's hand for the benefit of the sick sister.

Mrs. Clarboy accepted it graciously.

"And I am sure, sir," she remarked, "I'm right glad to see you at last. I've often said to pore Jenny, 'Depend on it, this is only for a time.' They'll forgive Master Lancey in the end, and have him back."

"It was very wrong of me to run away from home," said Lancey, with apparent candour. "I have long been very sorry I did it."

A look of indescribable intelligence darted into Mrs. Clarboy's eyes. She had the air of one who feels that she knows more than she wishes to know, and would fain hide it. She coloured deeply. "Yes, sir," she answered, without looking at him, and then added hastily, "And how might that lady be—her that we used to call the lodger?" Then she looked at him. He had drawn back a little, and seemed abashed. So she hurriedly went on: "You find all a good deal growed up

about us, sir, you and Mr. Don John ; while you're away at school, or at college, or where not, the trees grow on ; we shall be almost smothered in them soon."

"Yes," said Lancey, looking about him rather forlornly. "Well, good afternoon, Mrs. Clarboy," and he withdrew.

There were the others standing at Salisbury's door a little farther on.

Oh, what should he do ? Surely Mrs. Clarboy knew something, or at least suspected something ; but it was manifest that no hint had ever reached the girls. He went on to join the party—he must, or they would wonder why.

"Good afternoon, sir," said Salisbury, with a certain gravity as Lancey thought. Presently Mrs. Salisbury came out, and she too said, 'Good afternoon, sir ;' and Lancey, who had intended to be patronizing and pleasant, found that he had not a word to say. That visit was made

very short, and Lancey took special care not to be left one moment behind the others.

The manner and the words together amounted to so little—a look in one case, in the other a certain grave restraint. Is a boy who runs away to sea met in that fashion by cottagers several years after, when his withdrawal has been no concern of theirs ?

Lancey considered this matter, and could not feel at his ease. He took the first opportunity to ask Don John,—

“ I suppose none of the people about here know anything about *that*—about the unlucky time of my running away ? ”

“ Of course not,” said Don John, with conviction.

“ But they might suspect something.”

“ How nervous you are ! They know that Mrs. Collingwood is your mother.

Father told them. They know nothing more.”

“ Were you present when he told them?”

“ Yes, and they all behaved like country bumpkins as they are. They held up their hands, and some of them said, ‘ Lawk, you don’t say so, sir.’ ”

“ And none of them said anything about her having lost anything?”

“ I particularly remember that not one said a word about it.”

“ Well, then, I think *that* was rather odd !”

“ No, there was nothing odd in the manner of any of them. If they had known, they must have betrayed the knowledge.”

“ I consider that the poor are far better actors than we are. They knew father must hope they had found out nothing (I always hate myself when I think of the shame he felt about it). They like both

father and mother ; they may have known, and yet have spared them."

" Nobody knows anything," repeated Don John, yet more decidedly ; " you're saved, dear old fellow, this once. Only hold your head up, or you'll excite surprise, and make people think there is something wrong."

CHAPTER V.

LANCEY was still glad to be at home. He admired his two sisters; he thought his mother more beautiful than ever, and yet the pleasure of those holidays was made dim by his growing certainty that “the Lodger’s” loss and his disappearance were in some way connected together in the minds of his humble friends.

Don John was of an open, joyous nature. He was devoted and most dutiful to his father and mother; his abilities were not by any means above the average, but he was blessed with a strong desire to do his best. He was to leave school and be articled to his father; there was no talk of

his going to the University. He was delighted at this, but he well knew that it arose from a change in his father's circumstances, not from any desire to please him that he was to escape from the hated Latin and Greek, and take to more congenial studies. Don John accepted all his father's decisions as if they had been the decrees of fate ; he was no whit more thoughtful than most youths of his age, but he had somewhat unusual observation of character—he could make his influence felt at home, and much of his talk was seasoned with a peculiar humour. The friends of the family considered him to be a youth of great promise ; so he was in a certain sense, and a thorough good fellow ; but though he worked fairly well at school, and may almost be said to have done his best, he never brought home one prize during his whole career excepting for good conduct, while Lancey scarcely ever came home without one or two.

And Mr. Johnstone, having looked over their papers, always expressed himself to the full as much pleased with Don John as with Lancey, sometimes more so. Neither boy was surprised. This was only justice, and they forthwith subsided into the places that nature had intended for them. In the schoolroom Don John ruled just as naturally as he took the head of the table; he headed the expeditions; if there was any blame, it all fell on him. If any treat was to be obtained he went and asked for it. If any one of the party in childhood had committed an accidental piece of mischief of a flagrant nature, such as letting a pony down and breaking its knees, or making a great smash of greenhouse glass, Don John, whoever had been the delinquent, was always deputed to go and make confession, and he generally began thus: “Father, I’m sorry to say *we’ve* done so and so.”

Lancey was almost as much loved as

Don John, but he was neither feared nor looked up to ; he did as he liked, and was great in criticism, but not in command.

Lancey spent many an hour in thought during those holidays. He perceived that circumstances gave him a certain power. There was a great deal of cunning in his nature, he felt a little ashamed of Mrs. Collingwood because, as he perceived, “she was not a lady.” He had always been told that in the course of time he should be articled to the father who had adopted him ; but he had hoped for several years at Cambridge, where he should do much as he liked. Still he wished to be under Mr. Johnstone’s charge rather than under Mrs. Collingwood’s. Such love as he had in his nature he bestowed on the Johnstones, specially on Mrs. Johnstone and Don John.

But his first visit to “the houses” changed everything. He could not bear

to think of being so near to those people, feeling sure as he did that they were aware of his delinquency.

Another inevitable visit soon took place, and set the matter at rest in his opinion. He was sure they knew, just as sure as that his sisters did not.

And the servants? Had they, too, been made partakers of Mrs. Clarboy's and Mrs. Salisbury's suspicions? He longed to live "at home" again, but his fault had risen up and faced him when he hoped it was dead and buried. Why, rather than walk home through that field three or four times every week, he thought he could almost find it in his heart to run away again!

But there would be no need for that; he would write to Mrs. Collingwood, and make use of her to get his own way.

So he did, he never called her mother, and he was not base enough to use more

expressions of affection than just enough as he thought to serve his end.

This was his letter :—

“ MY DEAR MAMMA,

“ When you wrote to me about going on the continent to travel with you for a whole year, I did not consent to ask father’s leave, for in the first place I knew from Don John that he would not give it, for he meant to article me to himself; and in the next, of course I like better to be with my own family—the Johnstones I mean, of course,—than with you.

“ But you are very kind, and I am not so happy here as I expected—because I am quite sure those people in the houses know about it. You understand what I mean. And so, mamma, if you like, I’ll go the tour with you. I know I shall be disagreeable and cross to you sometimes when I think that I’m away from them,

but that I can't help, and I can hardly bear to write this letter, but I must.

"I think the best thing will be for you to write to father (not telling that I wrote this), and ask him if I may travel with you —you have said several times that if he wished one thing and I wished the same, you had no chance; but I think if you wish one thing and I wish the same, he will have no chance; but mind, mamma, if he is very angry and will not consent, I am off the bargain.

"I am, yours affectionately,
"L. AIRD."

In a few days a letter was written to Mr. Johnstone by Mrs. Collingwood, just such a letter as Lancey had suggested, and when the adopted son was told that the plan was out of the question he seemed much disappointed.

"You must either be articled to me or you

must go to Cambridge, you cannot afford to waste a whole year on idle pleasure. It is my duty to see that you are put in the way to earn a comfortable living—”

“ But I shall have four hundred a year,” pleaded Lancey rather dejectedly.

“ How do you know that? what makes you think so?

“ Oh, father, Mrs. Collingwood always says that of course what she has will all come to me.”

“ She is young, she may marry again.”

“ She says she never will.”

“ Well, grant that. Do you think I married, and that I bring up my family, on four hundred a year?

“ No, father.”

“ Or on treble that sum?”

“ Perhaps I shall have something more.”

“ Of course you will. We need not go into that question. There! forget this letter, it will not do—I wish to have you

under my own eyes, and living here, at home."

"But the people in the houses *know it.*"

"Know what?" exclaimed Donald Johnstone, forgetting for the moment what Lancey meant.

"Father, must I tell you what?"

No reply was made to this, the suggestion that his poor neighbours knew what Lancey had done was as gall and wormwood to Donald Johnstone.

"Mayn't I wait a year, and then perhaps you'll go back to Harley Street, and I could be articled to you, and not be in their neighbourhood."

"No; I shall never go back to Harley Street. I am not nearly so well off, my boy, as I was in your childhood."

"And yet you say that I shall have more than four hundred a year."

There was a long pause. Then Lancey said,—

"Father will you tell me one thing?" And before any answer could be made, he went on: "My father, Lancelot Aird, did he—did he save your life?"

"No," said Mr. Johnstone. He felt as if he had been taken at a disadvantage by this sudden question, but he little supposed that Lancey had long meditated asking it.

"Then he must have done you some great—some very great kindness, surely, father."

"No," said Mr. Johnstone, "he did not?"

"When you last saw him, did you promise him that you would bring me up?"

Had the secret been kept so long to be drawn forth by such a simple question as that; such a natural question, one that it seemed a son might surely have a right to ask? Donald Johnstone scarcely knew, but he looked at Lancey; he was impelled to answer, and could not help it.

"I never made Lancelot Aird any promise of any sort."

"He was not brought up with you?" said Lancey in a faintly questioning tone.

"No."

"When did you first meet with him, then, father?"

"I never met with him at all."

Lancey, on hearing this, hung his head. It was not for his father's sake, then, that he had been brought up.

"You have made a mistake, you see," said Donald Johnstone, in a low voice. "You have got an answer to a question which sooner or later you almost must have asked, and it is a shock to you. There is another that you now desire to ask, but it pleases me to observe that you cannot do it. I will ask it and answer it for you. It is, I think, 'When did you first meet with Lancelot Aird's wife.'"

Lancey, who had coloured deeply, did not move or lift up his face.

“I first met with her at a time of deep distress, when my son was about ten days old, and there was every reason to fear that I should lose his mother. I went once into her darkened room to look at her, and as my eyes grew accustomed to the gloom, I saw seated at the foot of her bed a young woman in a widow’s dress, who had my poor little infant son in her arms. She rose and curtseyed when she saw me, and I perceived at once that she was the wet nurse of whom I had been told, and who had been engaged. She was nursing Donald. The first time, then, that I saw her, was when her child was about two months old.”

Lancey, for the moment, was overcome with bashfulness, but when Mr. Johnstone said with a sigh, “I am not displeased with you, my boy,” he put his two hands

on the adopted father's hand as it was lying near there on the table, and leaned his face on it and kissed it. Then he said with a better, sweeter expression than had dawned on his face for a long time,—

“ I am glad you are such a good man, father, but—but that only makes it more wonderful that I should be here, and that you should be so fond of me. Why, when I was a little fellow I used always to think you were even more fond of me than of Donald.”

“ Did you, my dear boy? I am exceedingly attached to you, Lancey; and when you went wrong, and I was told of that former delinquency, I lost my spirits. I became ill.”

“ But I'm cured,” pleaded Lancey, with a sob.

“ Yes, I thank God for that hope. And now you perceive that by this conversation you have learned certain things; you took

me at a disadvantage, and I spoke. You had meditated for some time asking these questions?"

"Yes, father," said Lancey.

"I advise you, as loving you, which I have proved, and as deserving well of you—"

"Oh, yes, father."

"I advise you not to ask any more, but rather to court ignorance. Let things be, my boy. Even Donald is not more welcome to everything I can do for him than you are. Let that satisfy you, Lancey."

"I will let things be," said Lancey, in a low voice. "Father, if I never thanked you and mother *for all this* all these years, it must have been because till Mrs. Collingwood appeared it seemed so natural I should have it, that I never thought about it—any more than the others did."

"Nothing else that you could possibly have said—nothing!—would have pleased

me as much as this does!" exclaimed Mr. Johnstone.

Lancey was surprised. He saw how true his father's words were, that he had given him *great pleasure*. He could not but look inquiringly at him, and thereupon, with an effort, Donald Johnstone recalled his usual expression; and when Lancey went on, "But I want to thank you now, and to say that I am grateful," he answered, "That is enough, my dearest boy. Now go. I am about to write to Mrs. Collingwood. I am sorry she ever proposed to you to take this tour without first consulting me, and I must tell her it would not suit my views respecting you."

So Lancey left Mr. Johnstone, and even in the going, though his heart was warmed towards him, and he respected him more than for some time past, yet a certain ease of mind with which he had of late accepted his benefits was now gone. He

wondered, as he had not been adopted for Lancelot Aird's sake, for whose sake it could be? His opinion had been highly disrespectful also towards Mrs. Collingwood —perhaps hardly more so than she deserved; but the least suspicion of anything like the truth, and that he had been adopted for his own sake, never entered his head.

So Donald Johnstone wrote to Mrs. Collingwood, and told her that he did not consider a lengthened period of idleness and pleasure at all suitable for Lancey at his early age ; that he did not approve of mere feminine supervision for a high-spirited youth ; and that he trusted to her known affection for him not to damage his prospects by making the restraints of professional life irksome to him. The first step was now to be taken towards fitting him for his profession. When Mrs. Collingwood got this letter she was excessively disappointed ; and then, on reading

it a second time, she was exceedingly wrath. She felt the galling nature of this yoke under which she had put her neck. Lancey had made her so sure she should get her own way, that she was resolved to do battle for it ; and she wrote, urging her claim to his company, and begging that he might not be forced against his will to be frequently among people who knew of “the childish faults which he had been so long and so severely punished for.” “And besides, sir,” she continued, “you are quite wrong if you think my dear boy has no natural feelings towards me, his mother. He knows his duty to you, and he strives to do it ; but he takes it hard that he is never to be with me, and you may depend that I do.” Then she went on : “And I think it is but right, sir, that you should ask Mrs. Johnstone whether she thinks I ought to be always kept out of seeing my dear boy. She knows what a mother’s

feelings are ; and, though she is always so high with me, she will tell you that no mother could put up with what I am putting up with much longer.”

Of course Mrs. Johnstone saw this letter. She sighed as she folded it up. “ Donald, I am afraid if she will have him, she must have him. When we met, you carried things with a high hand, and I hoped she did not see her own power. Now, on reflection, I believe she does.”

“ Yes,” he answered, “ she is sure, you are sure, and I am almost sure, Lancey is hers. Let her take him for awhile, and I think she will be appeased ; but withstand her, and she will tell him all.”

“ You might exact a promise from her as the price of your consent.”

“ Oh, a promise goes for very little, my Star, in such a case as this. There is nothing that we ought not to do for Lancey, even to the point of telling him

ourselves, if he was in temptation, or seemed likely to fall again, and to know of such a possible part in us might help to keep him upright for our sake—only—”

“Only,” she went on, when he paused. “Only that, for the chance of elevating him, we should be sacrificing Donald. We should break Donald’s heart.”

“A boy’s heart is not so easily broken,” he replied.

“But he is our good boy—a very loving son,” she answered almost reproachfully. “Who has never made us ashamed of him. Shall we take everything away from him, and fill him with doubt and distress in order to give almost nothing to the other?”

“Not if we can help it, my dear,” and at that moment Lancey came into the room. “I’ve got a letter from my mamma,” he said, he would not call her mother. “She says you do not like me to take a long tour

with her, dear father and mother, but will I ask if I may go for one month?" The letter was duly read; "one month or six weeks" was the phrase used, and the letter was both urgent and humble.

"You wish to go?"

"Yes, father, if you don't mind."

Then observing that the tender woman whom he called mother was moved, and that her eyes, more moist and bright than usual, seemed to dwell on his face attentively, Lancey blushed and said, "I think I ought to pity her, for, as she often says, I am her only child."

Mr. Johnstone looked at him deliberately, and without any tenderness of aspect, he seemed to take a moment's time to consider his words, then he said, "If you were my only child, I should hardly love you more; certainly I could not be one whit more anxious for your welfare. Therefore, knowing her feelings, and considering that

her present request is reasonable (her wish to take you away for a year was not), I think if your mother agrees with me—” Here he paused, and it pained them both a little, when, after waiting just one short instant for her rejoinder, he said rather urgently,—

“Oh, mother, you always wish me to have treats—mother, you’ll let me go?”

“Yes,” she said, without looking at him.

He scarcely observed her emotion, certainly never divined that it was on his account, but he gave her the customary kiss they always bestowed when thanking her for any favour, and he took out of the room with him a vivid recollection of what Donald Johnstone had said. He felt a little daunted by it. He knew it would be a restraint upon him. But it was no restraint as regarded that only point at which just then he was in danger.

CHAPTER VI.

"WELL, now I have leave to go," thought Lancey, looking out of the window of his own bedroom; "now I have leave to go; and the question is, am I glad, or am I sorry? If it was not for the people in the houses, of course I would never lend myself to aid Mrs. Collingwood's plans. Is it really only because I have not courage enough to meet those people's looks that I mean to go? Of course things would be no better at the end of six weeks." He reflected on a sentence written on a distinct piece of paper and put inside her letter by Mrs. Collingwood: "Show this letter, my dear, to Mr. Johnstone, and I'll

manage, when we have once set out, to keep you as long as you and me think fit."

" Yes, as long as she thinks fit, whether I like it or not—for I shall have no money, I shall not even have my allowance."

He sauntered rather disconsolately down the corridor. After that short conference with "father and mother" he had, as it were, dismissed himself that he might write to Mrs. Collingwood. He looked out at another window, and there were father and mother in the pony carriage, and there was Mrs. Johnstone's maid behind with some bottles and a basket.

" Father " for once had taken a holiday, and all the party were to have lunch and afternoon tea in a wood about four miles off. Don John and all the girls were standing about the donkey—a babble of girls' voices came up to him very pleasantly. The donkey turned his head over his shoulder

with an air of discontent and disgust. Well he might, for little Mary was seated on his back, and Charlotte and Naomi were filling his panniers with crockery, a tin kettle, fruit, cakes, and all sorts of miscellaneous prov. Lancey was to run after them when he had written his letter. Really he hardly knew now whether he would write it or not.

He sauntered on; the door of Mrs. Johnstone's dressing-room was open, and he idly entered.

Lancey never had any evil intentions unless present opportunity seemed to his weak mind to be ministering to them.

He was thinking just then, "If I once go, then, however much I may long to get back, I shall have no money to do it with."

There was a good large dressing-case of Indian workmanship standing on the table opposite to him. Often when a little fellow he had been allowed to open it. He

remembered how mother used sometimes to let him and Don John rub her little amber and agate ornaments with wash-leather when she was by. There was an upper tray, with nothing of value in it, that he had often helped to put to rights ; there were some ivory hearts and some bangles in it—how well he remembered them !—and there were some Indian silver butterflies, which trembled on flowers with spiral stems. There were two or three trays in that box ; but when it appeared to be empty there was a little spring somewhere on which they used to ask mother to put her finger, and then they used to see a shallow drawer suddenly start forth and display its contents.

“ I haven’t seen it for years,” thought Lancey ; “ some old rings were there.” The colour flushed over his face ; he began to know that he was in danger, for he did remember again that he had no money.

He made no movement to go out of the room, but he half turned his head, and so it fell out that his eyes lit on a book which was lying face downwards on the table. He took it up open as it was. “Mother” had evidently been reading it before she went out.

For one instant it seemed as if, prescient of this visit, she had put the book there as a warning; for what was it that he read?

“There are two kinds of sin—wilful sin and willing sin.

“Wilful sin is that into which, because of the frailty of our nature, because of the strength of passion and temptation; not loving but loathing it, not seeking but resisting it, not acquiescing in but fighting and struggling against it, we all sometimes fall. This is the struggle in which God’s Spirit striveth with our spirit, and out of which we humbly believe and hope

that God will at the last grant unto us victory and forgiveness.

“ But there is another kind of sin far deadlier, far more heinous, far more incurable, it is *willing* sin. It is when we are content with sin ; when we have sold ourselves to sin ; when we no longer fight against sin ; when we mean to continue in sin. That is the darkest, lowest, deadliest, most irredeemable abyssm of sin ; and it is well that the foolish or guilty soul should know that on it, if it have sunk to this, has been already executed—self-executed—the dread mandate, ‘ In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.’ ”

“ Who wants to commit sin ? ” exclaimed Lancey aloud. “ Always preach, preach, preaching ;—I’m sick of it. And just as if I didn’t know the difference you talk of as well as you do—or better. *Wilful* sin is what we are dragged in to do for its own sake, but *willing* sin is what we plan to do

for *our* own sakes, because it will be to our interest at some future time. Well, I had better go and write my letter."

But he did not stir ; he gave the pages of the book a flick and they turned ; he could not stand there with no ostensible occupation, he actually began to read again.

" For first, my brethren, let us all learn that the consequences of sin are *inevitable* ; in other words, that ' punishment is but the stream of consequence flowing on unchecked.' There is in human nature an element of the gambler, willing to take the chances of things ; willing to run the risk if the issue be uncertain. There is no such element here. The punishment of sin is certain. All Scripture tells us so. ' Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished.' ' The way of transgressors is hard.' All the world's proverbs tell us so. ' Reckless youth, rueful age.' ' As he has made his bed, so he must lie in it.'

‘ He that will not be ruled by the rudder
must be ruled by the rock.’

“ Even Satan himself would not deny it. In the old legend of *Dr. Faustus*, when he bids the devil lay aside his devilish propensity to lying, and tell the truth, the devil answers, ‘ The world does me injustice to tax me with lies. Let me ask their consciences if I have ever deceived them into thinking that a bad action was a good one.’ ”¹

Something quaint or strange or striking impelled him to read thus far, or it may have been that he was ordained to have every possible warning this time ; he could not smother his better convictions without a long struggle, and he trembled. Something seemed to whisper within him that this time he could not say if he sinned that it was on the impulse of the moment and almost unawares.

¹ Sermon by the Rev. Canon Farrar.

But he stood stock still. He would not go out of the room. He sighed, and the colour faded out of his cheeks. "But if I was not to do it again," he whispered, "I ought never to have done it at all."

He put down the book—and went up and opened the box, and lifted the tray and touched the little spring.

The small box started forth at once and displayed its contents before his eyes.

He chose out a little faded ring-case of yellow leather he found in it. It contained an old-fashioned, clumsy ring, a ring for a man's finger. Perhaps about once in two years "mother" wore it on her middle finger. It had belonged to her grandfather. A handsome diamond ring. He took it out, closed the leather case, and put that back in its place. He pushed back the drawer and closed the spring over it, put down the trays, then shut the dressing-case and walked slowly out of the room—

with the ring on his finger. "Mother does not often leave her box unlocked," he said to himself, "she must have been in a hurry."

He thought with something like dismay of the good clergyman whose exhortations had been such a weariness to him. Then there flashed on his mind the only thing that had ever been said to him that had made an impression.

"Father" had talked to him but a few days before, and Lancey had without hesitation claimed as an excuse for his sin *a propensity* that he unfortunately had for laying his hands on what he saw before him. He was cured now—but there were unfortunate people who could not help stealing—and if great care had not been taken with him—for which he was very thankful (!) he might have become one of them.

His mentor answered, "No, my boy, a

thousand times no—what you have suffered from has been by no means an instinct of covetousness, but an absence of principle."

"I wished for the things," said Lancey faintly.

"But not for the mere sake of possession—not to hide them and go in secret to gaze at them. No, you took fruit that you might eat it—you took money that you might spend it. There is no powerful instinct of acquisitiveness against you: be afraid of the right thing, a feeble sense of justice, a slack hold on good principle."

He remembered this now because, of all that had ever been said to him, it had most impressed him. He was no Kleptomaniac, nothing of the sort. Reason showed him that possession was good, conscience did not govern him enough as to how he came into possession.

He spoke within himself from time to

time as he stood in his own room, looking out at the window.

“It’s worth about fifty pounds, that ring.”

“Mother does not want it; will not know perhaps for years that it’s gone.”

“But suppose it should be missed—is it possible that they would suspect *me*? ”

“Oh, they never would, they never could!”—Lancey was actually almost indignant at the thought of such a thing. He appeared to see—as if he was one of them, how unlikely such a thing was, what a shame it would be in their opinion. No, they ought not to suspect him. In fact, the thing was not done yet in such a way that it could not be undone.

It was almost time to set out to follow the family party.

“I can easily put it back if I like,” he murmured. “To rob one who has adopted me as a son!”

“ It sounds bad—”

“ In this house particularly—”

“ But this will only be an ideal loss after all—”

“ If it’s not found out, it can hardly be said to have been done—”

“ Very likely at the end of six weeks, having had no need to sell it, I shall bring it back.”

“ He that will not be ruled by the rudder must be ruled by the rod.”

“ I’ll put it back.”

“ To-morrow I’ll put it back.”

“ Before I go on my tour I’ll put it back.”

“ Well, if I mean to overtake them in time for lunch, I must start.”

He meant to put it back, but yet to keep it in his own power till the last minute, *for he might not have an opportunity to take it again.* Having said even this to himself, and provided for a possible future wish to be a thief, he went into a spare room which

was carpeted all over, lifted the carpet in one corner, and hid the ring under it.

“ I’ve done it now ! ” he whispered, with a sigh. “ Well, then, they should not try to make me live down here where that other thing I did is known.”

“ Perhaps I’ve done for myself too—”

“ Perhaps. It’s Mrs. Collingwood’s fault if I have. Does she suppose I care for her, that she suggests to me to cheat them as if I wished to do it ? To cheat them in order to be in her company ? ”

Lancey walked and ran through the fair woodlands and pastures till he came to the place where he was to join his people.

The father and mother, as more to one another than ever the children could be to them, sat a little apart, and looked on together. Two dark, eager young men hovered about Marjorie, ambitious to help her, desirous to absorb her notice.

Naomi and Charlotte cut up salad, Mary

held the dressing, Don John laid the cloth on the grass and set out the viands.

“I care for neither of those fellows, my star,” observed Donald Johnstone.

“Nor does Marjorie,” she answered; “don’t disturb thyself with any fear of an unwelcome son-in-law.”

“I suppose this sort of thing will go on till she makes her selection among the youth of the neighbourhood. It’s rather hard on Naomi. When first I saw you, Estelle, you were seated just so—just two such aspirants heaved windy sighs in your near vicinity. In twenty minutes I hated them with unchristian fervour. In twenty minutes more I loved ! I was blighted ! I had attained to the very fanaticism of jealousy ! And I remember even now, how a girl as graceful as Naomi and as pretty as Charlotte stood by, and none of us took the least notice of her. It was Leslie that I hated most.”

"Poor Leslie!" she said, with a quiet smile; "you were always very jealous of him."

He laughed.

"I could find it in my heart to be jealous of Leslie even now," he answered.

"I know you could, love," was her thought, but she only said, "What! when our grown-up children are about us? Donald, how odd that you should have taken it into your head to say that just now!"

"Why just now?"

"Because I had a letter from him this morning."

"No!"

"He is coming home invalided. His health seems to be quite broken up."

"Poor fellow! What an ass he made of himself! but he is a very respectable ass."

"And so conscientious!" she added, with a little, irrepressible laugh.

He looked at her inquiringly.

“ After expressing his unalterable affection, his deep respect for me, he desired that I would show his letter to you—‘ it was only right that you should see it—and then if you permitted it, would I write him a few lines of sympathy?’ There, now read his effusion ; and Donald, you really should not talk about being jealous of such a foolish fellow as Leslie, even in joke.”

“ I am quite aware of it, my star ; but look at our children.”

She looked, and the scene before them often rose in the memory of both parents afterwards. Don John was dipping water out of a tiny clear stream with a cup, and pouring it into a large china basin which Naomi held, leaning towards him with supple grace, and keeping her feet away from the moist brink. Don John might now almost be called a fine youth. He only just reached the middle height, but he

looked very strong, was well made, and had a charming air of contentment and intelligence. The two younger children, with Lancey, were hovering about the table-cloth, and Marjorie, with a somewhat pensive air, sat quietly on her throne; it was the trunk of a fallen tree. The two lovers, one of whom was a mere youth, a nephew of Mr. Viser, and the other a young officer, Campbell by name, gazed at her resplendent robe, her exquisite gloves, underneath which were yet more exquisite hands. They admired the incomparable grace of that hat with matchless feathers in it. A small locket rose and fell on her delicate throat, no jeweller's shop contained an ornament so deeply to be admired.

Marjorie and her sister were dressed and adorned precisely alike, even to the locket. Neither of the lovers knew it, the two looked so different in their eyes. Her hair was the reddest brown or the brownest

red ; wherever the light struck, it looked the precise colour of rust.

Marjorie admired a trail of honeysuckle which depended from the bough of a tree. Both the lovers started up to gather it ; then Campbell fell back, thinking that the occasion promised him a moment alone with her. Then Viser also held back ; how could he leave her alone for that same moment with his rival ?

Mary and Master Frederick Johnstone, now thirteen years old, perfectly understood this little scene. They burst into a laugh of keen delight ; Lancey joined, and Marjorie felt very foolish. Freddy's surprised eyes somewhat daunted her. They meant that it was ridiculous to have a lover, and it was ridiculous to be a lover. They seemed to ask what the young fools could be thinking of, and Don John exclaimed,—

“ It’s all very well for a time, but ‘ Blow these sparks ! ’ as the fire said to the bel-

lows, if they don't soon burst into flame I shall certainly go out."

" You are a very vulgar boy ! " exclaimed Naomi. " Mother hates slang, you know she does."

" Well, they shouldn't be so long about it, then. Let them propose, and she can accept one."

" Then that one would always be here ! "
" And I shall go out. Grandmother has asked me many times ; I shall go to Edinburgh."

In the meantime Charlotte had been walking up and down a short level space under the trees. There was a tree-trunk to bound her path at each end, and when she reached it she turned ; but getting quite lost in thought, she at last walked up to one of the trunks, and, being brought to a stand, forgot to turn, but stood with her face close to it cogitating, and quite unaware that certain peals of laughter

which she heard had any thing to do with her.

Don John pelted her with little rose-coloured fungi, and little buds of foxgloves, flicking them with such dexterity that several lighted on her shoulders. At last he threw a good-sized hedge rose at her hat. Then she half roused herself, and, calmly turning, gazed at them all. Even the lovers were laughing. Charlotte blushed; she knew not how to move, whether to join them or walk away from them. She was covered with confusion; but here was Lancey coming. Lancey held out his hand ostensibly to help her over the tiny brook, and when she put hers into it, he squeezed it. It was the very first time any one had squeezed her hand. With startled eyes she looked up. It was the same old Lancey, the familiar companion of her childhood, but somehow he looked different. Selfish fellow, he was only

pleasing himself for the moment; she did look so pretty. His fine eyes looked into hers and told her that she was lovely, and that he thought so. The admiration of the other sex, and what effect it might have on her, she knew at present nothing of. Sweet little Charlotte never had pretty speeches made to her; nobody wanted to appropriate the flowers she had worn, the gloves she had laid down; nobody stole her photographs out of the album; nobody "on his bended knees" begged for one.

Charlotte was surprised to the point of feeling confused, and yet there was a little elation too; and when she joined the party she had forgotten that they had laughed at her. She hardly knew what passed.

But Don John knew all about it, or at least he thought he did. He had seen the look between the boy and the maiden.

"I did not think Lancey could be a muff," thought this sensible youth with scorn. "And Charlotte to be so pleased! Ugh! they're all alike, I declare."

CHAPTER VII.

MANY a long day passed before those who met at that picnic came together again.

The next morning Lancey took leave of his parents, not without guilty beatings at the heart, for he took with him the ring. The affection they showed him—the almost confidence in him—he could not accept without some very keen stirrings of shame. He was only to be away a month, as was supposed, but he received a great deal of wise, grave, and truly fatherlike admonition and counsel. “What would he think if he knew all!” thought Lancey, and he held his tongue, and yet he was shaken, he was compelled to think the world into

which he was wilfully flinging himself was more full of danger, not than he had known, but than he had felt.

“ I’m a valuable article, and it’s manifest that Mrs. Collingwood is not thought competent to have the charge of me. Well, father’s right there ; I should be a fool indeed, supposing that I wished to go wrong, if I could not do it in spite of her.”

“ And now it is fully understood that this tour is only to be for a month ? ” observed Donald Johnstone.

Lancey answered, “ Yes, father,” and to take a tour of one month he went away.

And yet when he had taken leave of his sisters and of Don John, and went to kiss his mother, she was aware of something in his manner, something which he could not conceal, which struck her as if it portended a leave-taking for a long time.

He looked at her ; he was agitated as if in spite of himself. The diamond ring was

in his waistcoat pocket pressed so tightly by his arm against his heart that he felt it plainly. It almost seemed to burn him. But that was not all. He knew that he was not to be trusted ; he was sure that he should not come back. It flashed into his heart that this was hard on them, for they had treated him in all respects as a son. It flashed back to him in an instant that if he had been their own son he should have done it just the same, and then he gave Mrs. Johnstone his fresh young cheek, and having his free choice and time to think, elected to shake off the salutary yoke with the peaceful security of home, and if the tour proved to be delightful or exciting, leave it to fate to find him excuses for prolonging it, and to the same “agreeable party” to get him out of the scrape if the home authorities should be wroth.

In time circumstances would drift him home again, he would eventually render

himself so disagreeable to “his mamma,” that she would be glad to get rid of him, and then, throwing all the blame upon her, he could humbly beg pardon. And—would they forgive him? Of course they would.

At the end of the month, two or three letters having already been received from him, he wrote a very humble letter full of anxious excuses, and, as it seemed, of perplexity. He declared that Mrs. Collingwood, who, in other respects, was most kind, had suddenly informed him that she meant to cross from Brindisi to Alexandria, and spend some time in Egypt; that he had no money to come home with; that she was very willing to take him with her and pay all his expenses, “as was only right,” she said, “but she declined to give him money in order that he might leave her.” Certain phrases in this letter let Mr. Johnstone see plainly that Lancey had not concocted it without aid, perhaps prompting, from Mrs.

Collingwood. He was not deceived, but he felt himself to be powerless. He had long, indeed always, acted as if both the boys were his own sons, now he was made to feel that he could do it no longer without their consent.

As for Lancey, he was generally amused, often excited, but not always happy. He could not respect, he did not love the woman who was helping him to outwit his best friends. He soon got into idle habits, and the longer he stayed away the less willing he felt to go home and work and submit himself to the restraint of a well-ordered English family.

Feminine supervision was of little use to him, and he soon began to take advantage of Mrs. Collingwood's want of education, and more than once or twice helped himself to money of hers in the changing for her of one sort of currency into another. But even that was not enough ; before

they left Europe the ring was gone, and Lancey was the worse for a quantity of loose money always under his hand, yet not wanted for any good or needful expenditure. And he was the worse also for a fear that he could never dare to come home now lest the ring should be eventually missed and he should be suspected of the crime. Lancey pitied himself and he pitied "his folks," as he called them. "It's not so bad for them, though, my running away as it would have been if I had been their own son. It might have been Don John. Yes, and if I had been Don John—no, I mean if I had been the son and he the adopted fellow, I should certainly have done it just the same. Why, what a fool I am! I should have done it without half as much worry and conscience-pricking as I feel now, because I should have been so much more sure they would forgive me. Numbers of fellows run away—hundreds of

fellows, in fact—but—well, they don’t take any family jewels with them. How do I know that? Why, I don’t know it. I dare say I’m no worse than other people.”

All the winter in Egypt—wonderful things to see, strange fashions, a floating home, sunny temples in the sand, and blank-faced gods to find fascinations in; perfect impunity yet from any questioning as regarded the ring, and any calling to order, or even inquiry as to when he meant to return. And then having written several somewhat moderately penitent letters home, he got answers before they went up the Nile. “Father” at first was manifestly displeased, and yet Lancey thought he was restraining his anger, he wished almost, as it were, to propitiate the scapegrace. And “mother” did not so much blame as reason with him. He could have remained at the hotel if he had pleased, she said, and there telegraphed to his father to send him

money—he could easily do so now. Not so very easily. He did hesitate for half a day, but to spend almost a whole winter on the Nile, and see so many marvels, and have nothing to do but to please himself—how could he give this up? He did not give it up. And to see so much, increased his thirst for seeing more. So the winter wore away, and before the cherry blossom was out in the orchard behind his old home, just as the buds began to turn white, and the girls were saying, “Lancey must be on his way to us by this time,” there came a letter from him dated Jerusalem.

It really was a very nice letter, and it seemed to make out, though it did not exactly assert, that he had not heard from home for a long time, and he felt sure they would be pleased to know that Mrs. Collingwood, though she would not allow him to leave her, was yet very kind, and gave him every opportunity to improve himself.

He said nothing of how “father” had proposed to send him money, but left it to be supposed that he had never received that letter.

Mr. Johnstone felt that he was foiled. Mrs. Johnstone was very jealous of the other woman, and, with yearning love, began to admit for the first time that much as she had been wronged, Maria Collingwood had wronged herself more. She knew perfectly well that Lancey did not love her; he never spoke of her as “my mother,” only as “my mamma.”

As for Don John, he got accustomed in the end to the loss of this life-long companion. He ruled and reigned over the other young people and allowed Majorie’s lovers to perceive the good-natured pity with which he regarded them, not so much for “spooning,” as he called it, for that, as he graciously observed, was natural, but for being so long about it.

“I shall take the matter in hand myself,” he observed to Naomi. “Marjorie likes Campbell best, and, besides, Viser will not be able to marry for ten years, by what I hear.”

“Why, what can you do?” exclaimed Naomi, laughing at him.

“And after that,” proceeded Don John, “I shall look up some lovers, one each for you and Charlotte. If I don’t, I shall have you both on my hands all my life, so far as I can see.”

Naomi still laughed; “You can do nothing,” she repeated, “a boy like you!”

“We shall see. Campbell is horridly cast down because he’s ordered to Edinburgh. And I feel sure that ass Viser is putting off making his offer till the powerful rival is out of the way. I shall write to grandmother, and—well, I shall tell her my views.”

“No, Don John.”

"I shall! She will invite Marjorie to visit her; and I shall take her down."

"Well?"

"Well, father admitted the other day that though he had not cared for Campbell at first, he now thought he should like him very well as a son-in-law."

"Well?"

"He never has the least chance here, always some of you present, generally one at least of you laughing at him."

"Well?"

"I am not going to stand any more of this questioning. If Marjorie's frocks and feathers and things are not in good order, you will have to lend her some of yours, and Charlotte may lend her pearls—for she is going to Edinburgh in about a week, and I do not intend that father should be teased for any money for her just now."

He turned as Naomi, still laughing, but

believing that he was in earnest, walked on to the house.

He was in the middle of the cherry orchard, and, behold, there was Charlotte advancing ! The sky was blue above ; a cup of azure light without a cloud ; the trees were one mass of pure white blossom, and under foot the ground was covered with the glossy flat leaves and yellow astral flowers of the celandine. A blue and yellow world—all pure white and pale glory. Was there no red at all in it ?—nothing to give a hint of coming damask roses and the intense pure blush of the carnation ?

Yes, Charlotte drew near ; she was reading as she walked. Don John's time to rave about beauty was not yet come ; but he did look at Charlotte's damask lips and carnation cheeks ; and somehow he perceived that she supplied a deficiency, that she carried about with her all that nature

and April possessed of a very precious colour just then.

A smile of joy broke out over his face; something occurred that was a revelation to himself, and that in an instant he communicated to her. A crisp sound, as of a foot treading on last year's leaves and fallen twigs, was heard behind them; and there emerged from the side path, and evidently was making for Charlotte, a somewhat jaunty-looking young man, whose buoyant tread made him almost seem to dance up to her. Yes, he knew what he was about; he had a deprecating and yet a somewhat elated air.

It was the youthfullest of the curates. It was he of whom a very ancient dame in one of the cottages had said, "He been a father to me, he have."

"At last!" whispered Don John. "Now, Charlotte, remember Fetch's admonitions. The best of cousins withdraws."

He turned, and deliberately marched off, but so slowly that he heard the young man's greeting to the maiden. He heard him assure her that the weather was all that could be wished.

Don John joined Naomi.

Naomi was very much his friend. She thought it was not fair that Marjorie should have all the lovers and Charlotte none. For herself, a happy carelessness made her more than willing to bide her time. Meanwhile she and Don John shared confidences, passed family circumstances under review, and in their youthful fashion tried to throw good chances in the way of their sister and cousin.

And what was happening now?

Charlotte ought to have seated herself on the wooden bench in the orchard, and there the youthfulest curate, sitting cosily beside her, should have been allowed to say pretty things—that is, if he had any

in his mind to say : but no, it appeared, after Don John had told the news to Naomi—the remarkable news that somebody had actually come to call whose manifest object was Charlotte—and while these two, standing behind a white thicket of bloom, were deciding that mother should be informed of this call, and asked to invite the youthful one to lunch—it appeared that Charlotte, so far from sitting on the bench, was walking towards the house with a brisk, elastic step, he after her ; and he was not talking at all; it was she whose words were heard.

The brother and sister drew themselves closer together behind the bushes ; they did not care to be eavesdroppers ; but when they inevitably heard a few words of what Charlotte was saying, they looked at one another with just indignation. Charlotte had naturally been put out of countenance when Don John, with a good-

humoured but somewhat threatening air, withdrew, having let her know both what he thought and what he expected of her.

She glanced at the young curate, and he immediately became shy, ridiculously out of countenance and awkward. He opened his mouth, and, finding nothing to say, left it open for an instant, then actually fell back on the weather again, repeating his encomium on it, and declaring with earnestness that it was all he could wish.

Now shyness is almost independent of rules as it is of reasons ; but if any one thing may be said of it with certainty, it is this, that to encounter shyness greater than itself kills it on the spot. This is why shy people never think others shy. The one who has the quickest perception is instantly cured, and the other has to bear it all.

Charlotte pitied him, and became quite at her ease. She began to converse ; he,

more and more out of countenance, found nothing to say. So in a short time she came to the conclusion that he had nothing to say “of that sort.” Young men never had anything of that sort to say to her; there was no abstract reason for it, but so it was.

Now, if it had been Marjorie! She had often heard young men talk to Marjorie, and knew the style quite well of that sort of thing. In her modest mind, she could not see anything in herself to give rise to that sort of thing; she felt no leaning towards the curate. He asked after her aunt. Charlotte promptly replied that her aunt was well, and would be glad to see him.

So she proceeded slowly towards the house, and, as silence was awkward, began to talk about the book she had in her hand.

It was one of Max Müller’s. He, glad

of anything which, while detaining him in her presence, granted him some delay, while he recovered from this shyness, which was an astonishment to himself, responded gratefully. Everything she did, said, and looked, was right in his eyes. He thought she perceived the state of his affections, and with sweet maiden modesty—for Charlotte had a peculiarly modest manner—was occupying the time (thus, in fact, giving him the best kind of encouragement, and all with perfect tact)—the time till he could recover his manly courage and pour forth his heart, at the same time laying himself metaphorically and his prospects actually, at her feet.

But Charlotte, who at first had talked coolly enough about the book, presently began to warm with her subject. He responded as well as he was able; but, as she became earnest and eloquent, he found himself completely drawn away from what

he had intended. He could not think what she meant. Surely she was overdoing her part! He was quite ready to begin now, and she actually wouldn't let him!

No; nothing was farther from her thoughts. With hazy half-perception the youthfullest curate heard her explain that in some respects she dissented from the view of Max Müller, as she did from the school of those who had mainly founded themselves on him.

But before he knew what he was about he was assenting, while with keen regret she spoke on the instability of language. What was the instability of language to him, particularly just then, when they were drawing close to the edge of the orchard? He was so lost in astonishment that he opened his mouth again, and it was at that instant that, passing the thicket of young trees, Don John and Naomi heard Charlotte say,—

"Yes, of course, mere pronunciation is a matter of secondary importance ; and yet even in that respect any civilized nation must desire to escape change."

The curate assented with a forlornness which imparted an air of doubt to his words.

"It is always loss and never gain that an old, settled language has to fear," proceeded Charlotte. "I think I see one if not two losses not very far ahead of us. The Italians have utterly lost their aspirate; and it certainly appears to me that, even during the last twelve years, for I have noticed peculiarities of language about that length of time, it certainly appears to me that we are losing it too. This is sad, but I fear it is inevitable."

A murmur repeated at her side that it was sad.

"Even the pains we take (that is the more cultivated among us) to give the let-

ter ‘h’ due force, the increasing notice it attracts, the manner in which we measure culture by its absence or presence, all these symptoms show that we keep it and use it with difficulty and against the grain. Yet that we are in process of losing it I cannot doubt, and that we have been doing so for nearly 200 years ; before which date, as you have no doubt noticed, there is nothing in literature to show that our common people used it amiss any more than they now do the letters T, M, or D.”

The curate could not assert that he had noticed anything of the sort in literature ; but in a feeble sort of way he foundered through an answer, which amounted on the whole to dissent from Charlotte’s opinion.

“ If you think so,” answered Charlotte, “ only take notice of the first conversation you are present at. The aspirate is at present always given with due distinctness at

the commencement of a long or an important word, specially if it begins the sentence ; but I must say I often hear good readers and speakers soften the sound far too much in the little words when they conclude it. ‘ And what did you say to him ? ’ An Irishman will say, ‘ What did you say *toom* ? ’ ‘ She handed me her own bouquet ; ’ when you next hear such a sentence as that, remark whether the first aspirate is not sounded much more strongly than the second. I might give examples by dozens, but the fact is the danger is imminent, and I greatly fear the worst symptom is our unconsciousness. It almost makes me weep ; but I plainly foresee what the end will be.’

The curate was lost in astonishment ; he would have liked to comfort her ; but here they were at the hall-door, and if any one had told him beforehand that he should have found Charlotte alone, and been quite

unable to make his offer, and that in his ensuing state of discomfiture to be with a dozen other people would seem to him more desirable than to be obliged to talk about the instability of language, he would not perhaps have easily believed this ; but he knew Charlotte better now, and himself too.

CHAPTER VIII.

WHEN Naomi and Don John appeared to take their places at the luncheon-table, Charlotte and the young curate were seated one on either side of Mrs. Johnstone. Charlotte was full of enthusiasm, and the youthful one was staring at her with an expression of countenance which Don John understood perfectly.

He had entered the orchard fully intending to do a great deed, a difficult deed, and one that he dreaded inexpressibly. He had greatly feared a dismissal, and had many times pictured himself to himself as returning crest-fallen and dejected to his lodgings, with some such words as these ringing

in his ears :—“ I have the highest esteem, Mr. Brown, for your character, and I always find your sermons most interesting ; but the fact is my cousin, Don John, has had my heart from my childhood, and we are only waiting, &c., &c. ;”—and not having a high opinion of his own courage, he sometimes thought he might return without having been able to make his offer at all ; or, having bungled through it, might find himself confronted with a face full of wonder at his audacity ; for, of course, Charlotte must have a just idea of her own merits.

Thus he had tormented himself for some time, but nothing like this had occurred. A strange revulsion had taken place in his soul. He was not dismissed : he was quite at his ease with Charlotte opposite to him, and her aunt making him welcome. He had not committed himself in any way. Committed himself ! What an expression,

he marvelled, as he turned over in his thoughts the undoubted fact that it had occurred to him. And now, was he glad of this state of things? He could not tell; but he had a kind of involuntary sense of having escaped. He ate his luncheon with a certain urgency; laughed, and was more hilarious than usual; trembled, and felt rather cold. Oh, certainly she was handsome, handsomer than he had ever thought. He had never seen on any cheek such a pure perfect carnation. Her eyes did not sparkle in the least—they shone. She had the deepest, the most bewitching dimple in one of her cheeks—only in one—that he had ever set his eyes upon. It almost prevailed to plunge him again into his dream, and thereupon he looked at Charlotte; his shyness and embarrassment returned, and with them a necessity to talk—he must needs say something. He took up what had so much astonished him—the instability

of language—Charlotte's favourite despair.

For a few minutes it did well enough. He found himself half listening while she and Don John argued together. Then he lost himself in cogitations over the situation, till his wide-open eyes encountering Naomi's, he saw that her attention was attracted—she was observing him. He wrenched himself away from his inner self and listened.

"Yes," Charlotte was saying, "hopeless to stem the flood when once it has begun to rise."

"Well," Don John rejoined, "what then? The language has no abstract rights, the nation has. The nation must, it will, use and even change the language as it pleases."

"And, my dears," observed Mrs. Johnstone placably, "I think it was only yesterday that you two were rejoicing in some

changes that you felt to be improvements."

"In pronunciation," Don John put in.

"Oh, yes, aunt; it was a very curious circumstance, we were saying,—that while some provincial defects of pronunciation are handed down for generations, others even in our own day and since Dickens wrote (Dickens, who only died twenty years ago) are completely gone out, at least in the South and in London. 'Spell it with a *We*,' Sam Weller says to his father—and he always calls himself Veller. All that has vanished. I never hear any one say winegar or weal; I never hear William called Villam. And that shows that this peculiarity was less dialect than slang. Slang is always to be deplored."

"Deplored!" echoed Don John solemnly.

"But dialect to be cherished—one dialect is just as good really as another."

"Just as good as another!"

Charlotte appeared to find a protest rather than assent in this behaviour of Don John's. She went on : "It is only because our literature is written in one particular dialect of English that we give that the preference; this is intolerant, to say the least of it."

"Very; and after all a great deal of literature, and even poetry, is written in what we unkindly call provincial English. We have but to step into our own fields, for instance, to hear language very like 'the lay of the hunted pig:'—

‘So sure as pegs is pegs,
Eight chaps ketch'd I by the legs.’

I have often wept over the affecting beauty of that poem; I could now, only I would rather not. And how beautiful, how tender is the speech of the Wiltshire maid to her lover, when, feeling a little jealous of a rival, she persuades him—

‘ From her seat she ris’n,
Says she, Let thee and I go our own way,
And we’ll let she go shis’n.’”

“ Quite impossible to reason with you when you are in this mocking humour, and yet what I said was quite true, the London interchange of V and W has suddenly gone out, but one hears people leave out or soften the aspirate more and more every day, particularly in church and by clergymen,” she added, after a moment of reflection; “ and really and truly I have sometimes felt as if the service and the lessons were arranged on purpose to make this defect conspicuous.”

Mr. Brown here felt a tingling sensation down to his finger-tips, he coloured deeply, and knew not where to look. His own aspirates were not conspicuously absent, of course, but he felt a miserable doubt whether they were always adequately present.

Mrs. Johnstone for the moment could

find nothing to say, but Don John suddenly burst out with,—

“ Ah, those are ‘ school of cookery ’ tarts, Marjorie ! I am sure you and Naomi must have made them after your lesson.”

“ Of course we did, but how did you know it ?”

“ Because they bulge out in all directions, they are as slovenly as a bullfinch’s nest. Let me give you one, Mr. Brown.”

The curate accepted one. Charlotte meeting Don John’s eyes as he looked straight at her, began to perceive that she had made a blunder, and forbore from any further remark. The conversation meanwhile became general, and any contributions made to it by the guest were received with flattering attention by Mrs. Johnstone and Marjorie, who managed to put him at his ease.

“ Aunt, have I made a very terrible blunder ?” said poor little Charlotte, while

Don John and his two sisters accompanied Mr. Brown as far as the schools, which he had asked them to visit on his way home. “I mean an unkind blunder,” she added.

Mrs. Johnstone was always specially tolerant of Charlotte’s *gauche* speeches, and gentle with her shyness.

“It was a pity, my dear, that you made that unlucky remark. I am certain you did not mean to be unkind; but he felt it so keenly as to confirm me in an idea I had that he admires you, Charlotte.”

“I thought so too,” said Charlotte, “just at first, but after we had talked a little while I was sure he didn’t, and then—”

“Well, and then?”

“Why, we got interested in our conversation, and I quite forgot it.”

“So you thought he admired you?”

“Yes, but that was because Don John put it into my head. And it made me feel so shy and so ridiculous at first that when

I found it was not the case, of course I was more at my ease than usual. And so I talked to him."

" You should have let him talk to you."

" He had nothing to say. At least he had nothing to converse about of any real or solid interest."

" Well," said her aunt, taking care not to let the shadow of a smile appear on her face, " if he comes again, let him have time to lead the conversation to any subject he chooses."

" I could never take any particular interest in him."

" How do you know? you are almost a stranger to him."

" I am so sorry I said that," repeated Charlotte with a sigh."

Her aunt kissed her. What was the use of arguing with Charlotte or laughing at her? she would only be made more shy and more *gauche* by such a course.

She went to the playroom feeling very angry with herself, and began to turn over the leaves of the book of "Minutes," to look for the letters Don John had written to her on her behaviour to the "conflicting sex." This was the first :—

"CHARLOTTE,

"The mind of man (in which I include the mind of woman, even of young woman), the mind of man, as I have read in books, ever feels impatient of doubt.

"Thus when a fine young fellow, such as I am, one at the acme, point and prime of his life, at which time he is most interesting, and justly so, to the youthful female, viz. forty-five last birthday—one of good estate and old family—when, to come to the point, Fetch Fetch, Esq., begins to pay frequent and somewhat long calls at a house where there are three marriageable young ladies, it is very certain that his

motive in so doing cannot fail to suggest hopes to each of the three which she would fain translate into certainty, and doubt which she longs to solve.

“Yes, doubt. ‘Why,’ she will sigh to herself, ‘does this, the—shall I confess it? yes I will—the cherished hero of my dreams come day after day with a buoyant, an almost tripping foot, when the school-room duties are over, and having just put our prettiest frocks on, and our best lockets, we repair to the drawing-room to afternoon tea?’

“I think I see you now, Charlotte, as standing before your mirror you clasp your hands, while blushing at your own thoughts, you exclaim, ‘Naughty one’ (it is your own heart that you thus apostrophize), ‘art thinking of thy Fetch again? Oh’ (I hear you go on) ‘can it be for my sake he stuck that bunch of daisies in his button-hole? Is it because I kissed a daisy one day when

I thought he was not looking (at least, I think I thought so), and murmured over it, “Innocent poetic flower, come to your Charlotte’s heart” (at least, I think that’s what I said, or something quite as foolish). ‘Who,’ you go on, ‘shall resolve me this harrowing doubt?’

“Charlotte, I have an imaginative, and so far as such a thing is desirable in a fine young man, I have a poetic mind myself—and in the silence which would be complete, but that our dog is barking, and that my sister, Fanny Fetch, is chattering, and a dozen at least of sparrows are chelping at the top of the rick—in the silence I hear your spirit calling to me as plainly as possible, and I consider that it is only generous in me to resolve the doubt you have with so much maidenly reserve and modesty felt impelled to mention, at the same time telling you for your future guidance why you are not my object

when I sit spooning over your aunt's Bohea.

"Among the many reasons, Charlotte, why this is the case, one of the foremost is that you have such a vehement desire to be instructed. A fine young fellow seldom knows much. (I do not say that this is my case.) It frightens him to feel that he is liable to be put at a disadvantage by being asked questions that he cannot answer. And then, again, you have a no less ardent desire to instruct. If you have picked up any piece of information, you think it must needs be as interesting to a fine young fellow as to yourself. Now I may say for my own part that there is nothing I hate like being instructed and having to give my mind to learning out of school; when I am unbending among a lot of pretty girls, I like to spoon. It is my wish to feel that I belong to the superior sex. It is their business to make me sure that I

am an agreeable specimen of that sex. I must be set at my ease.

“ But I do not wish, as is too much your own habit, to talk at large and utter aphorisms. I wish rather to persuade you for your own good to alter your manner. I have heard that remarkably sensible young man, Don John, say of his schoolboy brother, that if he declined to obey any of his behests, he should persuade him with a stick. But the custom of thus persuading the fair sex has, to some extent, gone out in this country. Also it is almost decided now that woman is a reasonable creature ; in fact, if we did not think so, we could not blame her for being the most utterly unreasonable creature that ever lived, because this would not be her own fault, which it is. Observation and experience are counted among the gifts of reason. I appeal to these. You observe that fine young fellows fly from you, and you experience mortification ; there-

fore, Charlotte, I leave these to guide you, and will no more use (metaphorically) the stick; but remind you of the conduct of the charming Marjorie your cousin: when a stumpy young man with high heels to his boots stands talking near her and showing himself careful, by holding himself scrupulously upright, not to lose the tenth of an inch of his stature, Marjorie always keeps her seat if she possibly can; you never see her rise and from her graceful height look down upon him; when a stupid fellow blunders in an attempt to pay her some compliment, the best he knows how to fish up out of his foolish heart, she respects his dulness, she never smiles, she feels for him a gracious pity, and while encouraging no ridiculous hope, she saves his self-esteem by helping him to show himself to her at his best.

“With that last sentence, which I feel to be worthy of me, and very neatly put, I

remain, Charlotte, your sincere friend, and
your cousin Marjorie's lover,

“FETCH FETCH.”

Charlotte laughed a little over this letter. “But after all,” she said almost aloud, “I do not want a lover! It is not because I cannot have one that I need distress myself so much about my *gauche* behaviour, my shyness, my unattractive manner and stiff conversation. It is because I bore them at home so much with what they call my ‘poetic faculty’ and my ‘intellectual fads’ that I wish to be different. I lay down one subject after another, and urge it on them no more, but the fresh one, as I take it up, they laugh at just the same. I know there is something in what my aunt says, that there is no malice whatever in their teasing, and that if I became just like everybody else, it would make them all very dull, myself

included, for I should miss that attention now bestowed on me, and they would miss what helps to stimulate them and draw their interest to various abstract subjects, which otherwise (particularly the girls) they would never take any notice of at all.

“How kind and sweet my aunt is! Is she right, does it really amuse me as much as it does them?

“Yes, of course I do not want a lover—I should not know what to do with one—and yet, perhaps, even I might have a lover some day.

“Ah! here’s Don John’s ode that he wrote to make game of me for thinking that they could take any interest, any of them, in my essay on the nature and province of poetry. How they all laughed! Lancey more than any of them. It was two days before he went away—before he helped me over the brook. Don John declaimed it in the play-room in a voice of thunder,

putting intense emphasis on every short line.”

She glanced at the composition in question, it had been copied into the “Minutes” in a round text hand and ran as follows :—

“ To Charlotte on her demonstrating to me that poetry was altogether independent of rhyme.

Unto thee, O Charlotte,
Unto thee,
Do
I indite this
Ode,
For thou hast removed, O joyful
Day, an insurmountable obstacle
To
My being a poet. I may compare it
Unto a considerable obstacle,
Which,
This time last year, I being in the steamer
Crossing from Holyhead,
Rear’d itself right in front of me,

Looming to North and South ever nearer
And nearer.

I said, 'Now if I were minded
To

Cross the Atlantic to America I couldn't, in
Consequence of this insurmountable
Obstacle,'

Which at that moment we ran
Into,

Being prevented by a buffer from
Doing

Ourselves any harm.

The obstacle was in point of fact
Ireland.

And as to this day,
Whoso would cross the Atlantic,
Must needs sail round that
Con-
siderable obstacle,

For,
He cannot sail through it
So hast

Thou taught me, O Charlotte,
Sailing clear of the obstacle of rhyme,
To
Be a poet."

Steps on the stairs. Charlotte pricked up her head; Naomi and Don John entered.

"Here she is!" exclaimed Naomi, "and not tearing her hair."

"Let her alone, Nay," said Don John. "We have business on hand, and she is only a poetess."

"I am very sorry, I am sure; I never could have believed I should have made such a blunder," said Charlotte.

"Well, we forgive you. We feel that it is of no use to reason with you; and if that speech is not severe enough to cure you, nothing is."

"And besides," proceeded Don John, following up his sister's remark, "if that

young ass had anything better to do, it can hardly be doubted that he would do it instead of—”

“Instead of wasting his morning,” interrupted Charlotte, “in paying such a long call. He only came here to while away the time.”

“Well, he has not much to do; he told me himself that he walked to the railway station, which is three miles off, every day to buy a penny paper—for there being only 200 poorish people in the parish, and they being almost always quite well, he felt a delicacy about paying many visits. ‘You are quite right,’ I said, ‘not to harry your parishioners.’ Well, now, Charlotte, you are actually forgiven, and going to help us—going to be of use to the best of cousins.”

“What am I going to do?”

“Help us to write a letter to grandmother; you are not the only person in this

house who has poetic visions—I have had a vision too. Methought (that is how your last vision began; I read it, for you left it in the play-room blotting-book)—methought, Charlotte, I saw Dizzy and Gladstone playing at pitch-and-toss with the British lion, as if it had been a halfpenny. ‘Heads I win !’ shouted Dizzy.”

“ And which did win ? ”

“ You should not interrupt the vision. Why, the lion methought came down upon his head of his own accord, and, winking on them both, spake in pretty good English. He said fair play was a jewel ; and it was now time that the public should see how he looked when he was wrong end upward. Then the Lord Mayor, for methought he was looking on, the Lord Mayor said, ‘ That was a beautiful and affecting speech, “heads I win ;” ’ and when he saw what the lion had done he put up his hand to feel whether his own head was in its place.

Then the vision brake and faded (that's a quotation); and pondering on it, methought I too will play at pitch-and-toss with circumstances, as this gracious vision (that's another quotation) suggests to me. I will see what will turn up, eke I will write to my dear grandmother; and Charlotte and Naomi shall help. Well?"

CHAPTER IX.

“ WELL ? ” repeated Don John : “ are you quite lost in amazement ? I like to see a poetess gazing at me with her mouth open.”

Charlotte hastily shut her mouth.

“ And we want you to give us some of your large copying paper,” observed Naomi, “ because, as we told you before, we are going to write a letter to grandmother—a very particular letter.”

“ Why ? ” asked Charlotte.

Don John told her in much the same fashion as he had told Naomi in the orchard —having first arranged their chairs in a

triangle that the party might have a “three-cornered crack.”

“I know Marjorie likes Campbell,” said Charlotte. “I know she feels his going away.”

“You do?”

Don John glanced at Naomi, who nodded.

“Why didn’t you take that for granted,” she observed, “when I consented to help with the scheme?”

“But as you did not know it,” observed Charlotte, “why this sudden zeal for match-making?”

“Well, if you must know, it is partly because I have within the last few days heard a piece of news which I know makes father uneasy.”

“From whom?”

“From Lancey.”

Charlotte blushed, and wished to ask, but did not, whether Lancey was coming home.

"Mrs. Collingwood has four hundred a year of her own, that is, as she told father, it is absolutely at her own disposal, and she could leave it to whom she would. She added that she should of course leave it to Lancey. She made a will before she went abroad, and deposited it with father of her own accord. Father has sometimes alluded to this will to me, and said it pleased him."

"Well?"

"Of course we know that Lancey being adopted by both father and mother, they have always said they should look after his interests in the future."

"Lancey is a dear boy," said Naomi, with the least little contraction of her forehead as if for thought. "And if father and mother had any real *reason* for loving him so much, of course they would long ago have told us; therefore I have for some time been sure they have no reason: they

let him come to stay with them for a while, they got fond of him quite unawares, and kept him on and on, till at last they loved him almost as they love us; and it seems to them quite natural that they should, and also quite natural that we should think so. I never grudged Lancey anything in my life, but though it does seem natural that we should all love him, yet surely his place in the family is remarkable."

Don John looked keenly at his sister and listened attentively while she spoke. This was a subject on which, from his boyhood, he had thought a good deal, and nothing that he had arrived at as a reason for Lancey's place in the family had satisfied and pleased him so well. "After all," he thought, "why should there be any great and important reason? Why will not this reason do, which is hardly a reason at all?" His thoughts went on while both the girls were silent. "Perhaps if I had not in-

stinctively been so careful to hide from father and mother that I felt the least surprise, I might have been told."

"But the news," asked Charlotte at last, "what is it?"

"Mrs. Collingwood is going to marry again."

"Lancey says so?"

"Yes; it seems that she was very desirous to keep him with her, and she proposed to go back to Australia, and overpersuaded him, he says, to go too. She took passage in the P. and O. steamer as far as Colombo, where she promised him they should stay a month. And there was a man on board whom Lancey calls 'a gentleman of position and fortune,' but father says the account he gives of him sounds as if he were an adventurer. He declared that he fell in love with that short, fat, little woman at first sight; he landed with them at Galle, and when Lancey wrote, his mother

was to be married to him in a day or two."

"And that will make a great difference to Lancey?"

"Of course, because, if there were no settlements made before the marriage, every shilling she has is now her husband's; and she cannot make a will. As to the will she made before, it is no better than waste paper."

"Then Lancey will have to work?" said Charlotte.

"Oh, yes, of course; so have I—still—" he paused suddenly, and did not add, "but my father's children are worse off than they were by that four hundred pounds a year, for Lancey and I cannot both be wrong, and we think that in our early childhood we were told we should be left equal in father's will, and Lancey thought afterwards that he was to have less from father by four hundred pounds a year.

"And that's very odd," he said aloud; "it's very extraordinary," and while the girls bothered him as to his obliging desire to get lovers for them, and declared that there was no chance of his succeeding, he sat lost in thought.

"This news is only part of my reason," he said at last, "and I did think Marjorie liked Campbell, though I was not sure as I am now."

Don John was still almost a boy in years, and he was young for his years, otherwise he would hardly have concocted such a scheme, and deliberately detailed it to his grandmother, which, with the help of the two girls, he now actually did; saying, however, nothing about his father's circumstances.

His grandmother was excessively amused, and wrote forthwith, telling him that she would decide what to do in a day or two, and desiring that he would on no

account mention the matter to any one. By the same post she sent his letter to her daughter-in-law, requesting to know her opinion, and asking her to name her wishes, but not to betray the confidence reposed in her. Marjorie's father and mother had a long, loving consultation over it, the father not without shouts of laughter, the mother with somewhat admiring amusement.

The family was at breakfast three days after, when the letters came in, and Mrs. Johnstone, turning one of hers over with the quietest of smiles, said, "Edinburgh, I see." The three conspirators blushed furiously, Don John was pink up to the roots of his very light hair. Mrs. Johnstone began to read the letter aloud. It set forth that the grandmother had, for some time past, not seen any of the girls, and had quite suddenly determined to ask her dear Stella to spare one of them.

Here, with the gentlest audacity, she paused, and beginning again at “quite suddenly” repeated the sentence. “One of them to spend a couple of months with her; she should prefer to have Marjorie,” here Marjorie blushed as rosy red as the others had done, not one of the young people could look up, the father and mother exchanged glances, Mrs. Johnstone went on. “And, my dear Stella, will you let Don John bring her down, for I have not set my eyes on the young rascal for some time.”

When she had finished reading, she folded the letter quietly, the conspirators neither spoke nor looked up, so she looked at Marjorie, and said, with a gentleness which was almost indifference, “Do you think you should like to go, dear one?”

And Marjorie replied, with unwonted hesitation, that she didn’t know.

That settled the matter in the mother’s

mind, she immediately said, much more decidedly, “ Oh, I think you should accept your grandmother’s invitation, and besides, as she asks Don John too, you should not deprive him of the visit.”

“ Oh, yes,” Marjorie interrupted, sparkling all over, and blushing with pleasure, “ and he has actually never been to Edinburgh yet; you would like to go, Don John, wouldn’t you ? ”

And so the matter was settled. And all that Don John had proposed was done to the letter: Charlotte did lend her pearls, and Naomi her prettiest feathers, and scarcely any money was asked for, Mrs. Johnstone, from the contents of the Indian box, fitting out Marjorie with various beautiful ornaments, and having some most becoming dresses made for her from her own wardrobe. Nobody knew what was becoming to Marjorie so well as her mother, and she sent her forth to conquer.

The daughter had no more than her mother's beauty, but she had inherited the same reposeful serenity and convincing charm.

Don John, with pride and confidence, took charge of her ; brother-like, he declined to let her have anything to do with the taking of the tickets or the looking after her luggage. It was therefore all left behind, as was that of a young man's in the same carriage. When this was found out, which was in consequence of Marjorie's looking out of the window, and seeing it with her own eyes as it stood on the platform, she made at first some lamentation, but Don John and the young passenger became friends over the telegraphing for it at the first stoppage, after which Marjorie was almost persuaded by her brother that it was safer on the platform than in the van, and would reach Edinburgh almost as soon—if not sooner !

But there is no need to enlarge upon this experience of Marjorie's. There is probably no woman living who has not gone through it; a more uncommon part of the matter was that the three young people thus left together discovered that they had many friends in common, that they knew all about each other's families, and were going to visit at houses situated not a hundred yards apart.

The young man's name was Foden. "Campbell is too common a name to please me," thought Don John, "but I like it better than Foden." Why this thought came into his head will appear very shortly. "Marjorie Foden sounds foolish, so does Duncan Dilke Foden," he cogitated thus as they reached Edinburgh.

"Why, she's as tall as her brother!" thought the grandmother when the two young people presented themselves. "An awkward height, and her hair as red as rust."

"Campbell's laid up with the chicken-pox," she whispered to her grandson, as soon as Marjorie had been escorted to her room.

"The chicken-pox?" repeated Don John, with scorn.

"Yes, all the children of the regiment have got it, and he caught it."

"Oh, well," answered Don John, rather dreamily. "I don't know that it particularly signifies."

His grandmother looked sharply at him.

"I suppose you know that he's a great flirt?" she went on.

Don John woke up suddenly.

"No, grandmother, I did not."

"Yes, after I had decided to invite you both down, his old aunt—Miss Florimel Campbell, coming in, amused me, as she supposed, with tales of his flirtations."

Don John repeated, with rather more

decision, “I don’t know that it particularly signifies.”

And it did not signify at all, for Duncan Dilke Foden, presenting himself almost immediately after breakfast the next morning, to pay an outrageously early and outrageously long morning call, passed through a succession of changes in manner, mind, and face, which the grandmother read as easily as from a printed book. He was elated at the sight of Marjorie, and expressed as much delight and surprise as if she might have been expected to evaporate in the night, or to melt like a lump of sugar; and then he became suddenly humble, as one who had no right to be glad; and then he was afflicted with a great desire to talk sensibly and seriously, as one desiring thereby to excuse too long a presence; but at this stage of affairs Marjorie broke in quietly with some commonplace question. Duncan

Dilke Foden was taken in hand, first set at his ease, and calmed, then made to show himself at his best, and finally let alone to remember that he had paid a long visit, and with a tolerable grace to tear himself away.

Pondering on this visit soon after, the grandmother said quietly to Marjorie, "What sort of a fellow is young Campbell?"

"He's not very wise, grandmamma," answered Marjorie.

"Did not I hear something about his paying ye a good deal of attention?"

"Oh, yes, he did."

"And not the only one to pay it—at least, I have had hints to that effect."

Marjorie lifted up her fair face, "But that is not my fault, grandmother, I do assure you."

"Meaning that ye have no wish to be a flirt. No, it is not your fault, I dare say; but, Marjorie, it *is* your misfortune."

"Yes, I used to be a great deal happier before I had all these ridiculous compliments," answered the young girl, mistaking her meaning. "And yet, grandmother, though I have never had any attentions from any one I cared for—no, I mean I never have cared for any one yet—"

"Well?" asked the grandmother.

Marjorie laughed, but answered, not without a little ingenuous blush of embarrassment,—

"I used to be so happy at home with the others, and now though I could not, on any account, marry any one of my lovers—"

"No?" exclaimed the grandmother, interrupting her.

"Oh, no, certainly not—yet you cannot think how utterly flat and dull everything seems when I haven't got one. I did not care in the least for Campbell, for instance, yet I had got so accustomed to his

compliments that when he went away I hardly knew how to do without him. You think me a very foolish girl!"

"Just like her mother," thought the grandmother. "And so ye did not care for Campbell, my dear; well, so much the better for Foden."

"And yet I do wish to be different," proceeded Marjorie.

"If the men will let ye!" interrupted Mrs. Johnstone.

"And I was so glad when your letter came. I am sure I shall enjoy this visit so much."

"And Foden—what are ye going to do with him?"

"I sent him away as soon as I could this morning, without hurting his feelings."

"There has been a great deal of harm done by that false proverb, 'Marriages are made in heaven.'"

"Grandmother?"

"In one sense everything is decreed above; but in the other sense it may fairly be said that marriage is the one thing heaven leaves to be made on earth. Her birth, her station, her fortune, her beauty the maid had not the making of; but if she does not exercise her wits, and her best discretion as regards her marriage, nothing her people can do can much avail her."

"Of course we ought not to marry for money," observed Marjorie, demurely; "nor," she went on after a pause, "without being in love."

"How many lovers might ye have had already," asked the grandmother; "six?" Marjorie laughed.

"Well if ye cannot deny it, six it is; and, as I said, not your fault, perhaps, but certainly your misfortune, for if ye cannot love one of the first six, why should ye love one of the second six? The girl that is really well off is she who waits some

time, has one chance, and, it being a reasonably good one, takes it thankfully."

"Oh, I shall like some one well enough to marry him in the course of time," said Marjorie, who was very much amused at her grandmother's way of putting things.

"That is how your mother used to talk. She felt no enthusiasm, she once told me, for any of her lovers, and I answered, 'Consider which is the best worth loving and on the whole the most agreeable to ye, then dismiss the others, and let that one have a chance.' If it had not been for me," she went on, with perfect gravity and sincerity, "your father never would have won the wife he wished for. She had many lovers, and did not care to decide between them; but I talked to her. I said, 'Yes, many lovers, but one is old, and one beneath ye, and one above ye, and one is not a good man; and here are two left that are thoroughly suitable, but one of those even

has an advantage not possessed by the other, or indeed by any one of the others.' ”

Marjorie was interested, she had not expected to find that her father had needed any assistance in his wooing.

“ Well, grandmother ? ” she said.

“ Well,” repeated the grandmother, “ I said to her, ‘ There are women, Estelle, that long to keep their sons single, and there are those who look to patch up fallen fortunes with rich daughters-in-law, and there are women of such a termagant nature that all their sons have quarrelled with them, and there are women illiterate enough to make their daughters-in-law ashamed of them, and I know of one who dreads a beauty more than anything, and thinks such a one must needs be a spend-thrift ; ’ and now said I, ‘ I have named the mother of every lover you have but one, and that one longs to see her son

married, looks for none but a small fortune, and would willingly help him from her own, desires an equal match and a beautiful young wife for him, has loved him more than anything mortal since her widowhood, and would thankfully resign him to—you.’’

“And what did mother say?” asked Marjorie.

“She said she would think of it, and she did.”

“Mother always talks of you with so much affection. She always says you are so good to her.” Marjorie did not add, “and I often hear her remind father that it is his day for writing to you;” that would have given pain, but it was true.

There was something rather sweet, as Marjorie felt, in being thus shown a glimpse of the past. Something so fixed, so inevitable, so without alternative as the marriage of her father with her mother had

hung in the balance then!—had been a matter for discussion and for persuasion.

“Your mother was greatly admired,” proceeded Mrs. Johnstone, senior, “and as was but natural, she soon found out that all the good and worthy young men were more alike than she could have supposed. As the proverb runs, ‘*She wanted better bread than can be made with wheat,*’ she went on seeking for it. She did not want merely a good and worthy young man; she told me so. But said I, ‘Ye do not propose to live and die single?’—‘Oh, no, she proposed no such thing.’—‘My dear,’ said I, ‘men are not made of better stuff than yourself, far from it! But ye have had choice of some of the best of them, and I think your real difficulty comes from this, that you put your fancy before your duty.’”

“Duty!” exclaimed Marjorie, drawing

herself up, and speaking for her mother as well as for herself.

“ Yes, it is a woman’s duty, if she has many lovers, to set them free from vain hopes, by choosing as soon among them as she can, even if she make some sacrifice to do it, with only a sincere preference for one, and as your mother said, ‘ no great enthusiasm.’ Such a self-sacrifice is almost always rewarded. There is nothing so sweet as duty, and all the best pleasures of life come in the wake of duties done.”

CHAPTER X.

DON JOHN thus announced his sister's and his own safe arrival at Edinburgh :—

“ DEAREST NAOMI,

“ We reached our destination last night just as it was getting dusk. Grandmother is not at all grown.

“ I am much impressed with the magnificence of this city. The streets are fine, the populace polite, and the various methods of locomotion, omnibuses, cabs, tram-cars, &c., are admirably arranged, and convey the traveller cheaply and expeditiously in every direction. The view from Arthur's Seat is remarkably fine, as is also that from Salisbury Crags. I will not ex-

patiate on the prospect from the ancient castle, its reputation is European.

"I am writing before breakfast, and have not yet quitted the house since my arrival. Immediately after breakfast, I propose to do so, in order to view the various objects which I have so graphically described. I trust, my dear girl, that they may be found to justify the terms in which I have spoken of them. With this ramble I shall combine a visit to the railway terminus in search of Marjorie's luggage, which I left behind at King's Cross. Grandmother appeared to think this strange, but I reminded her that we are all subject to the law of averages, and as, on an average, half a box per thousand of all that this railway carries is left behind, lost, or delayed, and somebody must be owner of that half-box, she ought not to be surprised if that somebody proved to be her granddaughter. She said that as

Marjorie had three boxes, and had lost them all, her average was rather high. A truly feminine answer, which shows that she did not understand the question. Ah! I see a railway van coming up with those three boxes in it. Yes, the luggage is come.

“ Best love to father and mother and all of you.

“ Your affectionate brother,

“ DONALD JOHNSTONE.”

When Naomi read this letter aloud at the breakfast-table, one more person listened to it than Don John had counted on. Captain Leslie was present, a sunburned, stooping man, very hoarse, very grave, and very thin. He had called on Mr. Johnstone the day before in London, and when he found that he was not recognized, it appeared to hurt his feelings very much. But he was so much changed by

climate and illness, that when he had been invited "to come down and see Estelle," Mr. Johnstone carefully telegraphed to his wife of the expected arrival, lest she also should meet him as a stranger. He was a distant cousin of Mrs. Johnstone's, hence the use of the Christian name.

When he had seen his first and only love with her children about her, in a happy English home, and looking, to his mind, more beautiful than ever, when he had heard the cordial sweetness of her greeting, such a glow of tender admiration comforted him for long absence, such a sense of being for at least the fortnight they had named to him delightfully at home, that his old self woke up in him; isolation on staff duties, irritating heat, uncongenial companions, exile, illness, all appeared to recede. He had thought of his life—excepting his religious life—as an irretrievable failure; but for that first evening he felt strangely

young. He was very stiff, and when he reared himself up, his own iron-grey head, seen in the glass, confronted him, and appeared for the moment to be the only evidence about him of the time that had passed. Estelle was a little different, but it was an advantageous difference, motherhood was so infinitely becoming to her ; and as for Donald, he took the honours of his place so quietly that the old bachelor and unsuccessful lover did not grudge them to him as he had done at first. He spoke but little to his wife, being even then aware that the old love in Leslie's heart was as intense as ever.

With a keen perception of everything said and done in the presence of Estelle, Leslie felt that her husband scarcely looked at her ; but he could not know the deep pity with which his successful rival regarded him,—what a short lease of life he appeared to him to have ; how little, as he

supposed, there was yet left for him to enjoy in his native country.

That night Leslie thought a good deal of Estelle's eldest son ; he was much disappointed to find him away ; his letter the next morning presented him in a rather unexpected light.

" Is that your boy's usual style of writing, Johnstone ? " he inquired.

" Yes, I think it is ; he is a dear, good fellow, but quite a character, and he always had naturally a whimsical way of looking at things."

" I am glad the luggage has arrived," observed Mrs. Johnstone ; " but is it quite fair, Donald, to speak of our boy as an oddity ? "

" My dear," exclaimed her husband, " I wish him to be what pleases you ; but I have thought of him as an oddity ever since he was six years old, when he said of the cook on his birthday, ' She put my

cake in the oven, and it rose ambrosial as Venus rose from the sea.' ”

“ It was clever of him,” said little Mary, “ for he had not been to a cooking-class as I have.”

Leslie smiled.

“ And Don John invented Fetch, you know, mother,” observed Naomi, “ and Fanny Fetch and the ‘ Minutes.’ ”

Mrs. Johnstone made no reply, but Leslie had a real motive for wanting to investigate Don John’s nature and the character he bore at home ; so after breakfast, when left alone with the girls, he easily got them to talk of him, and at the end of less than a week he was quite intimate with them, made welcome to a place at the playroom tea, treated to Charlotte’s opinions on things in general, consulted by her as to her poetry, and even allowed to read selected portions of the “ Minutes.”

These abundantly bore out his father’s

opinion that he was a character ; but Leslie made one mistake about Don John at once, for finding how many of the papers consisted of criticisms on Charlotte's opinions, remarks on her behaviour, or counsels to her on her literary productions, he jumped to the conclusion that Don John must needs be half in love already with the beautiful little cousin ; he wondered whether Estelle knew it, and he forthwith began to take a keener interest in Charlotte also for his sake.

The girls liked him ; little Mary loved him, "though he almost always talked," she said, "as if it was Sunday."

He had not been in the house ten days before he was in the confidence of all the young people, and at liberty to turn over the leaves of the "Minutes" for himself.

He thought he knew Don John thoroughly, and Charlotte too. His religious counsels, his unconscious betrayal of a life-

long interest in them and their parents and their home ; his unexpected knowledge of various incidents before their birth, which had hitherto been unknown to themselves, all combined to make them think of him as one who might be trusted absolutely, and who had a right almost to the position of a near relative. He gave them presents, too, and discussed with them beforehand what these should be. As the days went on he found himself more at home with the children than with the parents. Estelle was the love of his whole life ; but she was in a sense remote. Her children and Charlotte became intimate with him, as much by their own wish as by his, and they in the same sense were near.

He felt towards them as an uncle might have done ; he perceived that the parents consciously allowed them thus to ally themselves with him, and he did not know the reason.

On the mother's part it was done because it made more easy her personal withdrawal. He must needs love her; but it was better for him to widen his interest and love her children too, and amuse himself with them than have opportunity to sit apart with her, and waken up again the old want which for so many years had slumbered in absence.

On the father's part it was from pure pity. Why should not Leslie enjoy the flattering consciousness that these young creatures liked him? His time was so short; the sods of his native valley would be laid over his head so soon.

Leslie did not think so. He supposed that he had come home to recruit his health. Estelle and her husband had no reason whatever to suspect the scheme which was taking form in his mind; he delighted himself with the certainty of this fact.

Various little hints let him perceive that

Mr. Johnstone, if not actually somewhat embarrassed in his circumstances, was assuredly not well off. “As to my making their son my heir,” he would cogitate, “they have no reason to think I have anything worth mentioning to leave; but it is sweet to know that when I am taken to my rest, Estelle will reap a benefit from me, dead, which living I could not give; she will dwell more at ease if her eldest son is provided for. Johnstone cannot feel jealous of my memory as he might have done if I had left it to her; and Estelle will know well that all I did for her boy was for her sake.”

“But he is a character,” continued Leslie; “his father was quite right!”

Leslie had strolled into the play-room, the girls had gone to their cooking-class, and he had wandered through the down-stairs room without finding their mother. It might have been supposed that he would

go out, but no, the girls had strictly charged him to wait for their return, when there was to be an early lunch, and he was to go with them to a farm-house to choose some-lop-eared rabbits which he had promised them.

“ He’s a character,” repeated Leslie, and he turned over the leaves of the “ Minutes,” as he had full leave to do. “ Here’s some of his handwriting—all about Charlotte—always Charlotte. Let me see.

THE POETRY OF MISTER BARNES, DONE IN THE DORSET DIALECT.

“ What is it you do find in thik theer book ? ”

Says I.

“ They poems,” says the maid, “ they be so high ;

When on un I do look,

They fill my heart wi’ swellin’ thoughts,

Idyllic,

The most ecloguey thoughts they do !

And I attain to view

The worrold as though 'twas made anew.

And I do feel," she says, says she,

" So frisky as a lamb under a grete woak
tree,

So light's a little bird,

A hopping and a chirruping
Over the fuzzzen."

(Thinks I, " My word ! ")

Says she, " You muzzzen
Laff," for she read my thoughts in a
trice.

Says she, " This here's the poet's vice
A speaking to 'ee." " Oh," says I, " shut
up."

I couldn't stand no mwoor 'ee see.

They all cried, " What a vulgar bwoy he
be ! "

And I did call out passen drough the door,

For I was forced to flee,

" Do'ee shut up."

"Innocent enough all these writings," he observed to himself, "and they show activity of mind in an unusual degree. Oh, that these dear children had the root of the matter in them! I must not shrink from talking to them on their best interests."

To do Leslie justice, he never did shrink from uttering anything that was on his conscience, and all his religious discourse was considerate and evidently devoid of affectation.

The fortnight came to an end. Leslie by that time was so desirous to see Don John, that if any opening had been given him, he would have proposed to prolong his stay.

He went away one morning, accompanied by all the girls to the station. The next afternoon Don John returned, and was in like fashion accompanied from it.

After he had seen his mother he was borne off to the play-room, where, at after-

noon tea, he ate as much cake as would have spoiled the dinner of most young men; but Don John's appetite at that stage of his career was spoiling-proof.

Mary being present, a certain caution was observed in the discourse. "You hardly ever wrote to us," said Naomi.

"But I wrote to mother—"

"Yes,—well, there could have been nothing particular to tell us. How is Campbell?"

Don John looked a little confused during the first part of Naomi's speech; he answered the second part.

"Campbell? why, we never saw him once."

Charlotte and Naomi looked as if they thought this very bad news.

"Not well yet?"

"Grandmother thought that for another day or two he was just as well away. But, I say, what about Captain Leslie?"

"Oh, we liked him so much!" exclaimed little Mary, "but he's a very good man."

"But !!—Yes, I know he's very religious."

"And very evangelical, of course," observed Charlotte. 'Officers in the army always are when they are exceptionally religious."

"Why should they be?"

"Well, my theory is that they have so many rules to enforce and obey—so much to do with discipline and drill, that it is natural they should take to that sort of religion which is the most gentle and free from hard rules, which insists least on the letter and most on the spirit—"

"How many officers of that sort do we know, three, isn't it? Quite enough for you to found a theory on. I think Captain Leslie must be an odd fish."

"No, he is not," said Naomi, "but he talks often just as father does when on

some rare or serious occasion he has one of us into his own room and—”

“ What ! did he pray with you ? ”

“ He asked mamma if he should pray with us before he went away; she said ‘ yes,’ and so we all knelt down in this room,” and here little Mary in all simplicity attempted to give an account of this prayer.

Don John opened wide eyes of surprise at his sister, but they had sufficient reverence for her childhood not to offer any comment.

“ And he says that God loves us,” she continued, “ and so we ought to love people—and poor people too.”

“ But, my dear little woman,” exclaimed Don John, not at all irreverently, “ I think we knew that before Captain Leslie came here.”

“ Yes,” said Mary, “ but I did not think about it ; and now I am going to love the poor people, you know.”

"And Mary took one of her birthday half-crowns to give to Miss Jenny ; she asked him if he thought that would be a good thing to do ; and I went with them to give it," said Naomi, still quite gravely. "And Mrs. Clarboy, who generally knows how to adapt her talk to her company, made rather a mistake, and got herself reprobred, for she told us her nephew had taken her to an entertainment in London, which she had very much enjoyed. Captain Leslie asked what it was about, and she said, 'Well, I can't hardly tell you, sir, what it was about, but there was a good deal of music, and Cupid came down and sang something sacred, his wings were beyond anything, sir, they were as natural as life.' Then Captain Leslie said he hoped she was not in the habit of frequenting the theatres ; and she assured him she had never been to one before, poor old soul ! and she was vexed with herself for having

told, and Miss Jenny groaned and was very much edified."

"And then we went on to Mrs. Black's, to give her my other half-crown," said Mary shrewdly, "and he asked her if she went to church, and she said 'she'd been so massacred with the rheumatism that nobody couldn't expect it of her,' and then Captain Leslie laughed, and he said afterwards he was sorry he had done it, and it showed a great want of self-control."

"Poor old Clarboy!" exclaimed Don John, "the idea of her frequenting the theatres! I don't think she has been in London more than three times in her life."

Then Naomi went on : "She said afterwards, 'I know your pa's rather in the same line as that gentleman, miss, and never takes you to the theatres, but yet I shouldn't have minded letting him know, for he's not so straight-laced. However,' she went on, 'Captain Leslie's a powerful

pious gentleman, no doubt, and one like him it was that sent a tract to poor old Mrs. Smart on her death-bed. It was called ‘The dying Malefactor.’ If ever there was a peaceable, humble, blameless creature, it was that woman, and a joined member too of the Methodist connexion, but this world had got that hold on her still, that when I’d opened the envelope for her, and she saw it began in large letters “To you,” she burst out laughing, and she and I talked a good bit over it. It seemed such a queer thing to have done. I don’t deny that we did let a few sec’lar words pass over our tongues, till her daughter that is a Methodist too got vexed, and she says, ‘Now, mother, you have no call to think of these worldly matters any more, you lie still and mind your dying.’ Miss Jenny had groaned a good deal during this talk, but she never dares to interrupt her sister. As soon as

there was a pause she said, ‘True it is that Sarah Smart laughed on her death-bed, but I have good hope as it was never laid to her charge.’

“‘No,’ exclaimed Mrs. Clarboy, who never can understand Jenny’s point of view, ‘she was a good-living woman, and the Almighty (I say it reverently) would never take notice of such a small sound such a long way off.’

“‘It’s not that,’ cried Jenny, ‘it was that she was not one to put the least trust in her own works, she trusted in the Rock of our salvation, and three days after she died triumphant.’”

“If I was a guardian angel,” exclaimed Charlotte, “and might choose, I would never wait on people like us, but always on the poor—such people as these. When do we ever say things so beautiful in their simpleness?”

“Yes,” observed little Mary, “the

angels must be very much amused with them.”

Charlotte and Don John exchanged glances; “I think, if I were you, I would include children in my choice,” he said.

“But I forgot to add,” observed Naomi, “that Miss Jenny ended her account of Mrs. Smart by saying, ‘She’s gone where there’s no more sorrow—nor laughing neither;’ and Charlotte said, ‘Oh, Miss Jenny, I hope not, I think we shall often laugh in heaven.’”

“But don’t we think that at least angels can laugh?” asked Mary.

“There can be no laughing in heaven or among heavenly creatures that has malice in it—but many things witty and droll are without that.”

“But, Charlotte, if I met Don John in heaven, I should like him to call me ‘button-nose;’ do you really think he never will?”

"I am almost sure of it,—he invented that name to make game of you, only for fun, you know, but still it was malice."

"Well, then, I shall say to him, 'Though you are not to say it here, you must not forget that you used to say it.'"

"But why do you want it to be remembered?"

"He never said it when he was cross, but when I sprained my ankle and he used to carry me about the garden he did, and when you used all to be doing 'Fetch,' and Freddy and I knocked at the door, if we were not to come in he always shouted out, 'No, you two kids must go;' but when Fred was gone back to school and I knocked sometimes, he said, 'Oh, it's only button-nose,' and then I knew I might come in. So, as it's kind malice, I should like him to remember; for you know I couldn't help being the youngest."

"Well, no, I do not see that you could,"

but, Mary, I shouldn't wonder if when you get to heaven you find you're the eldest; don't you know that it says in the Bible, the last shall be first and the first last?"

"Do you think I shall be older than you, then, Don John?"

"It might be so—"

"I shall take great care of you, then, and if you are a baby when you come, I shall carry you about and show you all the beautiful things."

CHAPTER XI.

DON JOHN, now that his short holiday in Scotland was over, fell at once into his regular work, going up to London daily with his father. Meanwhile Captain Leslie spent a few weeks at different English watering-places in search of health which almost to his surprise he did not find. He meant eventually to live in Scotland, where he had some distant cousins, his only relatives excepting Mrs. Johnstone, but first he had wanted to see Don John and Estelle's eldest daughter Marjorie.

Don John had said in joke of his grandmother that she was not grown. Marjorie, under the auspices of this same grand-

mother, grew very fast during the months she spent at Edinburgh and its neighbourhood.

She was of a grave and gentle nature, moderate in her demands of life as to pleasure, and she was high principled and tender.

This same girl, who had not cared for an early marriage for her own sake, found a certain charm in it now that her grandmother had linked it in her thoughts with duty and even with self-sacrifice. She would not make more men unhappy, nor unsettle any for her sake, but she would essay to be an elevating hope and then a helpmate and a comfort to one; she would do her part to make one man and one home what God meant that they should be.

There are such people in the world, they need sometimes to have it discovered to them that such they are, and then they need a little guiding. Marjorie had only a very little of this last, but she had also the

advantage of being away from a sister and a cousin who were much inclined to criticize and make game of her lovers ; and, further, she had the advantage of a lover who had many manly qualities, and among them a capacity for all the improvement that comes to manhood from loving a beautiful and pure-minded young woman.

Marjorie, instead of amusing herself with this lover, looked out for his good qualities. He was of average height, of average good looks, his position in life was such as her own, he had excellent principles, he could afford to marry, and he loved her. This was his case, as she said to herself at the end of a week ; and hers was that she was inclined to be pleased with him, and to think a good deal of the self-sacrifice which life as a general rule demands of woman.

At the end of another week, she thought about this again, but as to average good

looks, anybody might see that his was a face which grew upon one. It was while she was dressing for dinner that she passed him in review on this second occasion, but there was not as much time as before to think of the self-sacrifice, because she had not quite finished considering his agreeable countenance when it was time to go down to dinner. He was coming to dinner. Don John was to go away the next morning. The brother and sister were alone together for a few minutes at night before they retired. Marjorie, seated by a little table, was untying some tawny roses and putting them in water.

Don John had never said a word yet to his sister about young Foden. He now remarked that her flowers appeared to require a great deal of attention.

“Yes,” answered Marjorie, “I shall take care of them because I have told Duncan that he is only to bring them every other day.”

“ Oh,” said Don John, and presently Marjorie said,—

“ What do you think of him ? ”

“ I think he is one of the jolliest fellows I ever knew,” answered Don John ; “ he’s so jolly straightforward and manly.”

Marjorie was pleased with this tribute to Duncan Dilke Foden, boyish though it might be.

“ He beats Campbell to fits,” continued Don John.

“ Oh, you don’t care about Campbell, then ? ”

“ No.”

“ Nor do I.”

Then after a pause,—

“ Don John ? ”

“ Marjorie.”

“ Though Campbell paid me so much attention, he—he went away without making me an offer.”

“ Just like his impudence.”

"Oh, but I was going to tell you that he wrote to me at home, where he thought I was, and yesterday mother sent me on the letter. He said he felt that on reflection he could not bear to be parted from me, and he had made up his mind to offer me his hand."

"Just like his impudence again ! Made up his mind, I like that. I call it quite a providence his having the chicken-pox, quite a providence and nothing less."

"I should like you to take his letter back to mother, and tell her—"

"Well, *tell her?*"

"Of course till he made me an offer I had no right to consider him a lover—"

"No, any more than you could any other fellow who had not yet offered his hand—"

The last two remarks probably came in by way of parenthesis, but Marjorie went on

as if she found the second very much to the point.

"Of course not, so I want you to tell mother that even if I was sure no one else would ever ask me to marry him, I must have answered Campbell as I did this morning. I said it could not be."

"I will tell her that."

"And nothing else."

"Well, so far as your having offers, there is, as I suppose, nothing to tell."

"Of course not."

"All right," answered Don John, and then they were silent for a few minutes, when Marjorie suddenly asked,—

"What is the middle height for a man, Don John?"

"Oh, from five feet seven to five feet nine. I measure five feet eight."

Marjorie reflected awhile, then she said,—

"They always say the strongest men are

those of middle height. It's just as well not to be too tall."

"Just as well," echoed Don John. He was in the habit of thus fervently endorsing his sisters' remarks when he wished to call their attention to them as absurd.

Marjorie laughed, but she blushed too, and then the brother and sister kissed and took leave of one another, for Don John was to start early the next morning, almost before dawn. He left his grandmother in rather an uneasy state of mind. She saw no reason to think that Marjorie cared for young Foden, but she perceived that she was giving him every kind of modest encouragement, and from time to time Marjorie sent a stab to her heart by making remarks which evidently showed that she had taken her grandmother's advice in good earnest, and would be actually glad to follow it if she could.

This good lady had all her life loved to

give advice ; she had been liberal as to the quantity of it, and fervent as to the manner ; but she had become fearless, because, weighty though she felt it to be, it hardly ever took effect. She remembered but two instances in which it had. These were important ones, it is true. She could not regret the first ; she might have cause deeply to regret the second.

“ And it was hardly advice at all,” she would sigh, when thinking this over. “ It amounted to no more than suggestion. I have put something into her head ; who would have expected her to be so docile ? ”

So the grandmother thought ; but she could do no more in this matter than her son had done, when, Donald being a little boy, he had once come in from the garden with a large basket of very fine pears just gathered, and had set them on the hall table.

The little fellow ran up and regarded them with open admiration, and his father

said, in a bantering tone, “ Do you think, Donald, if you were to try, you could eat all those pears before dinner ? ”

“ I’m not sure whether I could,” answered the child, scanning the half-bushel basket seriously.

“ What, not to please papa ! ” exclaimed the father, bantering him ; and being just then called away, the boy and the pears were left alone for about twenty minutes, at the end of which time Donald the elder coming back, Donald the younger greeted him in all good faith with,—

“ Well, father, what do you think ? —I’m getting on—I’ve eaten nine.”

Nine very large pears,—their stalks and their cores were laid in a row for his inspection. Donald the younger, strange to say, was none the worse, but Donald the elder was much the better : in talking to his children he took more pains ever after to make his meaning plain.

And now Don John had come home again, and was holding his head rather higher than usual. Like many another very young man, he had a sufficiently high notion of his own importance both in the world and in his family.

None but the unthinking or the cold-hearted are seriously displeased with this quality in the very young. It is in fact rather pathetic, rather touching ; a proof of ignorance as to what life, time, and trouble really are. And it often goes so soon ! Perhaps it is just as well that they should begin by thinking they are to do a good deal, and have a good deal, for nothing can be worse than to despond beforehand.

Despond indeed ! Who talks of desponding when things are so jolly ? Don John exulted every day of his life. It is true that he had been perfectly wrong as to Campbell, but then if it had not been for

him Marjorie never could have met with Foden. When he thought of this he whistled and sang every morning while he stropped his razor preparatory to the morning shave. He only shaved his very light moustache as yet, to encourage it to come on. His whiskers were but a hope at present, they had not sprouted.

His father's dressing-room was next to Don John's little bedroom, and when he heard the outbreaks of whistling, singing, and other signs of good health and good spirits that the young gentleman indulged in while dressing, Donald Johnstone sometimes thought of the pleasure expressed by the poet Emerson on hearing a young cock crow. It is somewhat to this effect : " When I wake in the morning, and hear a young cock lustily crowing I think to myself, Here, at least, is a fellow-creature who is in the best of health and spirits. One of us, he would have us know, is well, and has

no doubt as to his right to a place in creation. And this," he goes on to remark, "is a pleasant thing to be assured of in this doubting, low-spirited, dyspeptic age."

Somebody rapped at Don John's door, when he had been at home two days. He opened it with a little lather on his upper lip. It is possible that he was not sorry to exhibit this to Naomi, who was standing there.

"Come into the play-room as fast as you can," she exclaimed; "something has happened!" and she darted off without telling him what it was.

The celerity with which he obeyed the summons may be held to prove that shaving was not actually necessary, it must have been performed daily more as a pleasure than as a duty.

Charlotte was in the play-room, she had a letter in her hand, and looked at him as

if so much flustered, so much overwhelmed by the weighty event which had taken place, that she knew not how to utter it.

Don John sat down on the deal table—a favourite place of his. He surveyed Charlotte and his sister. “It’s an offer!” he exclaimed. “Charlotte, you’ve had an offer; it can be nothing less.”

“Oh, dear no,” exclaimed Naomi; “it’s nothing so commonplace! Your conspiracy that we helped you with came to nothing; but we contrived a better one while you were away, and it has succeeded, and nobody knows what it may end in!”

“Yes,” said Charlotte, “I can now see a vista opening before me!”

She handed him a piece of paper: as it was a post-office order for 2*l.* 10*s.*, he may have been forgiven for exclaiming, “I don’t think much of the vista if this is it.”

“But we hope it’s only the first of a

great many. Now listen ; Charlotte and I, when you were gone, looked over all her verses and essays and things, and chose out four, which I copied beautifully at her dictation, and we sent them to four magazines ; three were rejected, and we were getting rather despondent, but one is accepted, and this money is come, and here's the magazine with her thing in it—and among the notices to correspondents, ‘ We shall be glad to hear from a Daughter of Erin again.’ ”

“ Poetess ! I’m stumped ! ” exclaimed Don John. “ Even if you’d had an offer, I could not have been more surprised. Shake hands ; to think that anything should have been written on this inky, rickety deal table, that I have cut my name in with a buck-handled knife, and burnt my name in with a red-hot poker ! To think, I say ! No, I am not equal to thinking or saying anything—the most burning words would not

blaze high enough—they surge disconnected in my brain. Type—Fame—Wealth—Pica—Epics—Colons, and last, not least—Cousins. I am your cousin, Charlotte; when you become famous I should wish to have that remembered.” He fell into thought. “No,” he went on. “I never could have believed it.”

“Of course not,” said Charlotte, “you always made game of my things, and now you see ! ”

“Some of those poems, whoever pays for them, were the very mildest lot I ever set my eyes on. Everything you have ever done is the better for my criticism.”

“Yes, I know, I always said you had good taste and great critical faculty—and now I consider that really—in order that I may not lose all this money, &c., it will be your duty to help me as much as you can.”

“The young person, though she laughs, is quite in earnest. Yes, that is what

things are rapidly coming to. Some years ago this might have been thought affecting. Here is a young man, shall I say it? in his early prime, I think, girls, a fellow of my age—”

“Just beginning to shave,” interrupted Naomi.

“May so characterize himself—”

“As he swings his legs, sitting on the play-room table.”

“Without undue self-laudation (the voice of a poetess should never be strained to such a shriek as that!)—a fellow, I say—”

“He says,” echoed Naomi.

“A fellow, I repeat,” shouted Don John, “just launched into the responsibilities of life, and it is suggested to him as the most useful thing he can do, to criticize the poetry of a girl; I say it’s enough to make a Stoic grin; yes, she belongs to the dominant sex.”

"My dears," exclaimed Mrs. Johnstone, looking in, "are you aware that your father has been calling you for some time? What is all this laughing and shouting about?"

"And what is Don John roaring out for *about the responsibilities of life?*" said Donald Senior, looking over her shoulder.

"Oh, father and mother!" exclaimed Don John, "I hope you'll take my part, I am so crowded over by the superior sex!"

"Is that all?" said Donald Johnstone. "Do you good. Come down to breakfast, my Star, and teach your son to imitate his father; put yourself in your right place, my boy, and you will never be crowded over; you should submit the moment you find out what they wish, and then they will have no occasion to crow."

A henpecked man never talks thus; but the wife in this case was well aware that

either her husband's love for her, or his deference to her wishes, or his dependence on her judgment, made her very much what he often called her, his guiding star. As a rule he found out what she wished, and did it. But he was so absolutely blind to this fact that he rather liked to boast of it, and talk about the yoke of matrimony, which he never would have done if he had felt it.

But there were occasions when he would announce an intention, and then she never interfered.

“It never rains,” says the proverb, “but it pours.”

This remarkable news concerning Charlotte had not been half enough wondered at and discussed when the letters came in : one was from Edinburgh, as Don John saw at a glance before his father opened it, and one in Lancey’s handwriting, which was handed to his mother.

“Duncan Dilke Foden” was the signature of the Edinburgh letter, and before breakfast was over Charlotte and Naomi heard, to their great astonishment, that the said Duncan Dilke Foden, having made Marjorie an offer, she had desired him to write to her father.

With one consent his two fellow-conspirators looked fixedly at Don John, he must have known that this event was probable, and he had kept them out of his counsels. But the event was very interesting. Mrs. Johnstone read the letter, and handed it back again, when it was read aloud.

“Just like Foden,” thought Don John, who could not help noticing that neither father nor mother showed the least surprise.

As no one spoke, Don John said, while Mr. Johnstone folded up the letter, “I call it jolly respectful to you, father.

Foden is such a fine, straightforward fellow."

"Yes, the missive really reminds one, in spirit, at any rate, of some of the old Paston letters, '*Right worshipful, and mine especial good master, I commend me to your mastership as lowly as I may, and do you to weet that an it please you I am fain to seek your favour with the fair maid, my Mistress Marjorie, your daughter.*' This must be a great surprise to you, my boy?"

Don John looked a little foolish when his father said this; he wondered how much his parents knew, or suspected; was it possible that his grandmother had betrayed him?

A look darted at him by Naomi showed that she was thinking of the same thing.

He could not help glancing at his mother, but she gave him one of her benignant smiles that told nothing excepting that she

was “weell pleased to see her child respested like the lave.”

And the other letter? Well, there was to be no end to the surprises of that morning. Lancey was coming home.

CHAPTER XII.

IN another fortnight letters were received again from Lancey. They appeared to show an altered frame of mind, and opened a question which hitherto he had managed to evade and put by. “ He knew he had acted very badly, he had felt this for a long time. It was wrong to have thus gone away and kept away. He humbly begged pardon—would his dear father and mother forgive him ? ”

This in the first letter. In the second, by the same mail, but dated a week later, Lancey said that he and his mamma were miserable ; that she was very much afraid of her new husband ; she had no

settlements, and could not draw her own dividends. He had been very kind to her, till he had got her property into his own hands, and he now said that her son was an undutiful fellow, and ought to go back at once to the good friends whom he had left in England. That he would advance him enough money to pay the passage, which was all he should do for him. He ought long ago to have been earning his own living.

This second letter was addressed to Don John, who for a week or two after its arrival was almost as miserable as Lancey said he was himself.

But another mail-day went by, and there was no letter at all; then again the day passed, and Don John made up his mind that Lancey must be coming. He still retained an affection for Lancey, though in the minds of his sisters such a feeling had begun to fade. Don John knew all Lancey's

faults and delinquencies, yet he clung to him without effort. The girls knew none of his delinquencies, but sometimes one would say to another, "We ought not to forget him, poor fellow, considering how fond father and mother have always been of him."

As for Charlotte, she thought of him a good deal, but his behaviour, which at first had given her very keen pain, because she would not understand it, began in time to show itself in its true light. At first she would not see that he had meanly taken advantage of the Johnstones, had got away and kept away against their will; that he was shifty about the letters; that he pretended not to understand; that he was amusing himself as long as he dared, hoping to come back when he must, and throw himself on their bounty and goodness again. When Charlotte did begin to see this, she was ashamed for him, and all

the more because her own ideas of right and duty and gratitude were high. She also had a home in the same house which had sheltered him.

She scorned herself when she found that she had for many months been tacitly excusing his conduct to her own mind, as if it was not his duty to do the same things which in such a case would have been her duty; as if wrong could possibly be right for his sake. “ Could I misunderstand as he professes to do? What should I deserve if I treated my uncle and aunt thus ? ”

Charlotte for several months thought a good deal more about this than was consistent with her own peace. She could not help arguing the matter over, she was often weary of the subject and of Lancey too. Yes, at last she began to feel this, and then —well, then, happily for her, she ceased almost suddenly to think about it. The tired mind, which was vigilant in its desire

to forget, fell asleep over the subject unawares, and when it woke up again, the importunate presence was withdrawn. Charlotte soon began to forget how importunate it had been. Of course she had not loved him, but he had touched her imagination, and she soon must have loved him if he had not made her ashamed for his sake.

"It has been a rude shock to me," Charlotte sometimes thought. "I am obliged to see that he is mean, and not straightforward. I never can care for him as I might have done."

In the meantime Marjorie stayed three months at Edinburgh, was now engaged to young Foden, and about to return home.

The summer was passing, Charlotte had been invited to contribute to a well-known magazine, and when Lancey and his return, and Marjorie and her engagement had been discussed in all their bearings, this affair of hers continued to afford constant

talk, in which no one was more interested than Don John.

Even Mrs. Johnstone appeared to find the subject interesting, at least she frequently came and sat in the old play-room after Don John had come home in the afternoon. There she would quietly work and look on, and weigh in her mind something that Captain Leslie had said. She saw no good ground for his supposition, but she made many reflections as to whether any change in existing arrangements would tend to bring such a thing on or not.

But, no, there was no ground for such a thought, none at all. Don John was almost uncivil to Charlotte; but though he gave his opinion about her writings with a lordly air of superiority, he wished her to get on, because as he graciously remarked “she is one of us.”

“Now, look here,” he was saying once,

when, the conversation getting animated, she was drawn from her considerations about Marjorie and about Lancey to look at and to listen to him; “you always talk about the poets as if they were such sacred creatures that it is quite taking a liberty to see that there was any humbug in them even after they are dead. There is Wordsworth, for instance—”

“Any humbug in Wordsworth? how dare you!”

“I grant you that he was *crammed full* of human nature. He was full of us and the place we live in. We take a beautiful pathetic pleasure in reading him, because we like that a man who knew us so well should love us so much. But it was humbug in him to say that everything the poet writes is valuable and interesting because he writes it—for—for it isn’t.”

“Splendid reasoning,” exclaimed Charlotte, “and quite unanswerable!”

Don John, seated on the table, was making a cherry net. Charlotte and Naomi, standing at two easels, were painting decorations for a cottage hospital. Don John brandished the mesh and went on, delighted to see Charlotte fire up.

"I've never thought so much of that old boy since I found out that he did not know how to pronounce his own language."

"My dear," exclaimed his mother, beguiled into remonstrance, "what can you mean?"

"Well, mother, listen to this—

'I've heard of hearts unkind, kind hearts
With coldness still returning,
Alas the gratitude of men,
Hath oftener left me mourning.'

You see he pronounced 'mourning' as if it rhymed with 'returning,' which is the north country provincial way."

"Accidental," exclaimed Charlotte; "it

would have been out of the question to spoil such an exquisitely beautiful verse for the sake of a more perfect rhyme."

"I quite agree that the verse is beautiful; but, Charlotte, he always rhymes 'mourning' with such a word as 'burning' or 'returning.' I defy you to find a case where he did not."

"Then," said Charlotte, after a moment of cogitation, "perhaps that is the right way."

"That answer was just like you. As to Pope, I am almost sure he spoke with several provincial peculiarities. Look at his inscription on his grotto:—

‘Let such, such only tread this sacred floor
As dare to love their country and be poor.’

You see he pronounced 'poor' as Miss Jenny does 'pore.'"

"Nothing of the sort. It is a modern invention to be so particular about rhymes.

Pope felt a noble carelessness about them. So did Wordsworth. At the same time I must admit that one has sometimes very deeply to regret his carelessness in other respects. That most beautiful poem, for instance, on “The lesser Celandine,” how he took away from its perfectness by not being at the trouble to arrange the last verse properly! I dare say he dictated it first to his wife or his sister, and never looked at it afterwards. The states mentioned in the first two lines are meant to be contrasted, not the one *worse* than the other, but he says,—

‘ To be a prodigal’s favourite—then worse truth,
A miser’s pensioner—behold our lot !
O man, that from thy fair and shining youth,
Age might but take the things youth needed not ! ’ ”

“ Well, I see nothing the matter with it excepting that it is a pity he put in the word ‘youth’ twice. But he was obliged

to do so in order to have a rhyme for ‘truth.’ To be sure this rather spoils the climax.”

“ Of course it does. I have so often wished he had written just a little differently, it would have been so easy. Thus: ‘To be a prodigal’s favourite—then forlorn—(forlorn of that delightful favouritism, you know, and made) ‘a miser’s pensioner.’”

‘To be a prodigal’s favourite—then forlorn,
A miser’s pensioner,—behold our lot !
O man, that from thy fair and shining morn,
Age might but take the things youth needed not !’”

“ Well, that is what I call audacity ! That’s the real thing. If the critics could only hear you improving Wordsworth, wouldn’t you catch it !”

“ Of course I should ; but they never will ! And now be quite fair, for once. If you had first seen the lines according to my version, and had thought it was

the original, should you not have been very angry with me if I had proposed to alter it and put it as it now stands ? ”

“ I shall not argue with you, arguing as a rule sets me so fast in my own opinion. And, Charlotte, you are not asked to write reviews, you know ; if you were, there is no evil and contemptuous thing that reviewers may not say of authors and their works ; but I never met with one yet who after saying that a poet was a fool wrote an improved version of his lines to show the reader what they should have been.”

“ Why should you be surprised at my criticizing things ? ” said Charlotte. “ All intelligent reading is critical. Even our admiration of a master-piece is our criticism of it ; we judge it to be fine and true.”

“ She said the other day,” observed Naomi, “ that Keats wrote of Greek scenery as if he was describing an English market-garden.”

Charlotte excused herself. “ I said he wrote not differently of ‘ The sides of Latmos’ and of an English wood and brook. He is here in spring,—

‘ While the willow trails
Its delicate amber, and the dairy pails
Bring home increase of milk,’

and he hopes to write a good deal before the daisies

‘ Hide in deep herbage, and ere yet the bees
Hum about globes of clover and sweet peas.’

Then forthwith he is in a mighty forest on the sides of Latmos,

‘ Paths there were many,
Winding through palmy fern and rushes fenny
And ivy banks.’

Then he comes to a wide lawn—

‘ Who could tell
The freshness of the space of heaven above
Edged round with dark tree-tops through which a
dove
Would often beat its wings, and often too
A little cloud would move across the blue.’
Is not that England ? ’

“Certain sure. But you must not forget that in classic times there were forests in Greece, though it is as bare as a down now.”

“But was there ‘rain-scented eglantine’? did the cold springs run

‘To warm their chilliest bubbles in the grass’?”

Don John reflected—then shirked the question and disposed of the poets.

“I don’t know; Keats is a muff. I couldn’t read him half through. Wordsworth I respect, he knows all about me. But I think, as you delight in him so much, it is odd you are so fond of choosing out pretty and beautiful things to write about, instead of choosing to make homely things beautiful as he did.”

“I write of what I see,” said Charlotte. “We do not all live in the same world. In the swallow’s world, though it be our world, there is no snow.”

“Yes, but though the swallows never

heard of snow that is not the less their own doing. They live always in the light and the sunshine because they go to seek them. You mean that you too may go in search of sunshine if you please."

"I suppose I do."

"But the swallows are inferior to the robins for ever, because these last have experience of summer and winter too. However," continued Don John, "I am rather sick of the fine things written lately about birds. I suppose we shall hear next that they admire the sunsets."

"But it is nice," said Naomi, "to know that they delight in gay colours just as we do."

"Yes, and to be told almost in the same breath that man has himself only developed the colour faculty very lately indeed. Well, all I know is that I have frequently with a pewter spoon taken a pink egg streaked

with brown, and put it into a nest full of blue ones. If the bird I gave it to could see the difference between blue and pink, why did she sit upon and hatch the alien egg?"

"Perhaps *some* birds are colour-blind, as some of us are," said little Mary, speaking for the first time.

"I have sometimes thought," said Charlotte, "that whole generations and ages saw things differently as to colour. The ancients all agree that a comet is a lurid, a portentous and a red-coloured light in the heavens. Up to about two hundred years ago we never hear them spoken of as anything but red; but the comet I have seen could never have suggested anything but a pathetic calm, infinite isolation, and it had a pure pallor which made the stars look yellow."

"I saw one once when I was a little girl," said Mary, "it had a long tail, but the

next time they showed it to me the tail was all gone.”

“That tail,” said Don John, “was the comet’s ‘horrent hair,’ it got in between the sun and the planets, so it is probable that they sent for a number of old *Daily Telegraphs*, the largest paper in the world, you know, and twisted it all up in curl-papers to be out of the way.”

“They didn’t.”

“Well, then, perhaps the sun pulled all the comet’s hair off to fill up his spots with.”

“No, Don John,” said Mary, with sage gravity, “I would rather believe about the curl-papers than believe that.”

“Thereby you show your discretion, Mary, “always believe the most likely thing.”

Whether he would have gone on to explain this celestial matter to her, will never now be known, for at that moment a

servant, one new to the house, flung open the door, and not at all aware what a commotion the name would excite, announced,—

“ Mr. Lancelot Aird.”

Lancey was among them ; he had kissed his mother and sisters, Charlotte had greeted and shaken hands with him, and Don John was still clapping him on the back, laughing, shaking hands with him over and over again, then stepping back to exclaim on his growth and altered appearance, then coming close and shaking hands again, when he suddenly caught sight of his mother’s face, and both the young men paused surprised.

There was for a moment an awkward pause. Mrs. Johnstone, who had risen, was winding the loose worsted round a ball with which she had been knitting ; when she looked at Lancey, her eyes, more moist than usual, had a pathetic regret in them.

She said calmly, "Have you seen your father yet?"

"No, mother," answered Lancey, looking very foolish.

"Father's in the orchard, I'll go and tell him!" exclaimed little Mary, dancing out of the room, and almost at the same instant Naomi and Charlotte, each feeling that the manner of Lancey's reception at home was unexpected, stole quietly after her.

Don John felt his mother's manner with a keenness that was almost revolt against it. If he had been away so long and had been so met, he thought it would have gone near to breaking his heart, but he also saw instantly, because it was quite evident, that Lancey was not hurt in his affections, he was only a good deal ashamed. He had planned to take them unawares.

"You should have asked his leave before

you appeared among your brothers and sisters," she went on—oh, so gently. And then she sighed, and the two tears that had dazzled her eyes fell on her cheeks, which were coloured with an unusual agitation.

If Lancey had fallen on her neck, and kissed them away and implored forgiveness, it might even at that pass have been different.

But no, it was Don John who did that, while Lancey, looking red and irate, turned to the window, and appeared to look out.

"Oh, my mother!" exclaimed Don John, in a voice full of remonstrance and astonishment.

She answered calmly, looking into his eyes,—

"Yes, my son."

"You will beg father to forgive him, if—if indeed there can be any doubt about it. Mother! what can this mean—mother?"

His arm was still on her shoulder, she took her handkerchief, and wiping away her tears, said, “Lancey ;” and when he turned from the window she kissed him a second time.

“ Father has come in and gone into your dressing-room, mother, and he says Lancey is to go to him there,” said little Mary, returning.

“ No, mother, not there ! ” said Lancey, turning white to the lips. He had hoped to the last moment ; now, before he knew what he was about, he had betrayed himself.

When Lancey appeared at the dressing-room door with his mother, Don John was there, pale, shocked, faltering, choking, he had been entreating, questioning, what could Lancey have done ? what did it mean ?

“ You will forgive him ! ” he exclaimed.
“ I don’t know—I cannot believe that

there is no more than I know—but I cannot bear my life unless you forgive him.”

Lancey listened with eager hope. It was but an instant. Then before any greeting was given to himself, Donald Johnstone put his two hands on the young Donald’s shoulders, and looked aside to his wife.

She said, “Your poor son Lancey comes to submit himself to you, and to confess.”

“You will forgive him, then, whatever it may be, father?” cried Don John.

“My much-loved son,” was the reply. “If I had no better and stronger reason, I would forgive him for your sake.”

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2

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